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## US & CANADA SOUNDS OF AMERICA

*A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada*

### GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

## Daniel Okulitch

The Canadian bass-baritone on his recording of American art songs

#### Explain the concept of the album...

With each of the four song-cycles, we tried to find a narrative within them. Even the two songs in Jake [Heggie]'s *Of Gods and Cats* have similar irreverence and therefore work together as a pair. Across the album, I wanted a balance of mood – so although a couple of the songs by Glen [Roven] have a lightness about them, I liked the obvious humour of these pieces by Jake as a contrast. It was a rare opportunity to find four composers who were all happy to accompany me and were as excited about the project as I was.

#### How did the project arise?

Glen had approached me and said he was looking to record an album with me, and when we eventually met up in New York I realised that he was a very serious, legitimate musician. There isn't a narrative as such, but, as the name of his cycle suggests, *Songs from the Underground* was inspired by the poems he read on the tube while living in London.

#### What drew you to the other composers?

Jake and I were already friends from when I'd

done *Dead Man Walking*, so he was on board from the beginning. *Of Gods and Cats* had originally been recorded by Jennifer Larmore, so we had to change the key but Jake was very accommodating. Lowell [Liebermann] and I had never met but I immediately fell in love with the ethereal, atmospheric quality of his *Night Songs*. As for Ricky [Ian Gordon], we spent a wonderful afternoon playing through his pieces, and eventually came up with a cycle that charted an emotional journey which I could identify with. I love where 'As Planned', to words by Frank O'Hara, comes in the cycle. 'After the first glass of vodka you can accept just about anything...' – a moment of respite from what's come before.

#### 'As Planned' isn't the only song that has jazz influences...

Jazz is obviously a common aspect in American art song and, since I grew up singing musical theatre, that language and style is very familiar to me. In each song on this album, the music was very clear as to what it was asking of the voice. There's a laziness, a slurred effect, that I can do when



required, but in Glen's 'Ozymandias', say, the music is majestic and declamatory and requires long lines and a very opulent sound. I drew on my opera experience for that.

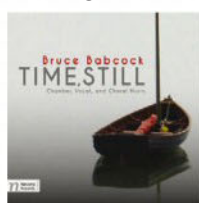
#### The album incorporates many styles...

I love that Glen's cycle, in particular, asks so many different colours of me. Every piece has a very different and obvious character. In 'Ozymandias', the profound nature of the emotion being expressed calls for the voice to sing with more substance. In others, like 'This is Just to Say' ('I have eaten the plums...'), I can bring it back to a thread of line. That's the glory of art song – the many textures you can create – and if you're wise, singing this sort of music can make you a better opera singer.

## Babcock

*Irrational Exuberance*<sup>a</sup>. This is what I know<sup>b</sup>. Springscape<sup>c</sup>. All unto me<sup>d</sup>. Metaphor Two<sup>e</sup>. Imagined/Remembered<sup>f</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Juliana Gondek sop <sup>ab</sup>Doug Masek asax <sup>f</sup>Armen Ksajikian, <sup>a</sup>David Speltz vcs <sup>b</sup>Rakefet Hak, <sup>ef</sup>Robert Thies, <sup>a</sup>Louise Thomas pfs <sup>d</sup>The Coventry and Canterbury Choirs of All Saints Church, Pasadena, CA / James Walker; <sup>c</sup>The Debussy Trio  
Navona © NV5998 (58' • DDD)



You might not expect a composer who has contributed to such action films as *Die Hard*

and *Lethal Weapon* to be as comfortable in the, shall we say, less driven world of chamber, vocal and choral music. Then again, Bruce Babcock is an unexpected composer, as this disc of his music, entitled 'Time, Still', reflects in striking ways.

The six works reveal a musician who blends superior craftsmanship with a colourful, expressive sense of narrative. Each piece is scored for a different complement of instruments and/or singers. All are fresh in texture. Babcock's rhythmic vitality is core to *Irrational Exuberance*, scored for alto saxophone, cello and piano. The sax (wondrously played by Doug Masek) is also present, with soprano and piano, in *This is what*

*I know*, four affecting and dramatic songs on poems of Dorothy Parker.

Babcock shows his Impressionistic stripes in *Springscape*, a glistening and atmospheric conversation for harp, flute and viola. The aura is completely different in *All unto me*, a soaring *a cappella* choral work dedicated to Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Brief, but haunting in its sense of time and stillness, is *Metaphor Two* for solo piano. The three movements of *Imagined/Remembered*, for cello and piano, range from zesty and lyrical to dark-hued and jaunty, with all sorts of delicious rhythmic and harmonic twists to maintain suspense.

Along with saxophonist Masek, the disc's performers comprise a host of superb Los

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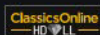
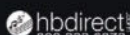
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Carl St Clair conducts his Pacific Symphony Orchestra in a recording of Elliot Goldenthal's *Symphony in G sharp minor on Zarathustra*

Angeles-based musicians, including the vibrant soprano Juliana Gondek and the fine Coventry and Canterbury Choirs of All Saints Church in Pasadena.

Donald Rosenberg

## D Crumb

September Elegy<sup>a</sup>. Soundings<sup>b</sup>. Red Desert Triptych<sup>c</sup>. Primordial Fantasy<sup>d</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Jerome Simas *cl* <sup>b</sup>Steve Vacchi *bn* <sup>a</sup>Fritz Gearhart

*vn* <sup>ab</sup>Corey Hamm, <sup>cd</sup>Marcantonio Barone *pf*

<sup>d</sup>ensemble / Robert Ponto

Bridge © BRIDGE9450 (65' • DDD)



This all-David Crumb CD from Bridge introduces a composer who writes music to

which performers cannot help but give full measure, as violinist Fritz Gearhart and pianist Corey Hamm do in *September Elegy*, whose final, haunting shriek high on the violin cannot easily be forgotten. The 53-year-old composition professor at the University of Oregon wrote the piece after 9/11 and, for its gentle, timeless mingling of love and pain, it needs to be heard.

Marcantonio Barone presides with similar intensity over *Red Desert Triptych*, the massive 35-minute title-track, which Crumb

calls 'a veritable symphony for solo piano', including moments of granite that would have satisfied Beethoven. The work is inspired by the monumental grandeur of southern Utah's national parks, and Crumb lays out programmatic references – and one to a Bach F minor fugue – in his booklet-notes. But this feels transcended as the pace and grandeur of each of its three movements sinks in. Barone produces similarly intriguing results in Crumb's adaptation for piano and small ensemble of his *Primordial Fantasy*, which shamelessly, raucously and winningly clamours for attention as it rises from an elemental goo into a semblance of coherent harmony and life.

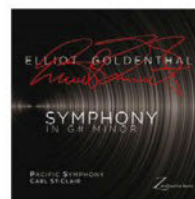
Crumb works further wonders with the unlikely trio of clarinet, bassoon and piano in *Soundings*, first performed at the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva 1994 in Mexico City; halfway into this eight-minute divertissement, played with colour and verve by Jerome Simas, Steve Vacchi and Hamm, he produces a delicious new sonic environment by setting the two trilling, crooning and rollicking woodwinds against a glittering piano score. **Laurence Vittes**

## Goldenthal

Symphony in G sharp minor

Pacific Symphony Orchestra / Carl St Clair

Zarathustra ® ZM008 (25' • DDD)



At the heart of Elliot Goldenthal's meditative *Symphony in G sharp minor* lies

a Proust-like core: the note G sharp on the Goldenthal family spinet had 'a particular timbre' that has stayed with the composer ever since. Asked by Carl St Clair and the Pacific Symphony to write a symphony 25 minutes in length for the orchestra's 2014 American Composers Festival, and never having written one before, Goldenthal responded with a brooding two-movement monolith in a key that, for string players – especially when divided into the first movement's nine parts – only a mother could love. Coming in at 24 minutes and 49 seconds, the *Symphony* sports a provocative structure. There's meaty stuff in the *Moderato con moto*'s long opening paragraph, with stirrings of impulse energy leading to a huge outburst by the orchestra, softened by gorgeous string solos bringing the movement to a quiet, exquisitely set-up end. A tough, virtuoso, dramatic *Rondo agitato* less than 8 minutes long follows.

St Clair and his Pacific Symphony deliver their customary Technicolor performance of music that Spock would

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 This album featuring Daniel Barenboim at the piano and Gustavo Dudamel on the podium was recorded live at the Berliner Philharmonie in September 2014. The combination of artists and orchestra created critically acclaimed results: "Barenboim digs into Brahms's two piano concertos with a nearly superhuman appetite... A magnificent display of power" (*Berliner Morgenpost*)



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recognise as post-Romantic; while the Zarathustra Music recording, taken from the three live performances ('no patch sessions'), lives up to its name. As good as the sound is on the CD, however, it must have been something to see during the live performances, three percussionists heading out to roto-tom stations placed strategically throughout the hall to rail down, as described in Richard Guérin's thrilling booklet-notes, 'an antiphonal barrage, a hailstorm of rhythmically charged particles'. **Laurence Vittes**

## Lansky

Contemplating Weather<sup>a</sup>.

Travel Diary<sup>b</sup>. It All Adds Up<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Western Michigan University Chorale; <sup>b</sup>Birds on a Wire / Kimberly Dunn Adams; <sup>c</sup>Meehan/Perkins Duo *perc* <sup>d</sup>Quattro Mani

Bridge © BRIDGE9447 (74' • DDD)



Paul Lansky, who retired in 2014 as Princeton's William Shubael Conant

Professor of Music, makes his 21st appearance on Bridge with three works written over the past decade that reflect his return to instrumental music after 35 mostly electronic years.

The most striking is *Travel Diary*, an incongruously beautiful series of meditations on the different stages of a percussion ensemble's road trip, played exquisitely by the Todd Meehan/Doug Perkins Duo tending an array of glowing bells and chimes, old signalling devices, horn calls, Morse code and more conventional instruments. The newest work is *Contemplating Weather*, commissioned by Western Michigan University School of Music to celebrate its 100th anniversary; premiered in 2014, the 35-minute work uses simple, proud verses by Kentucky-based poet Jonathan Greene to look back at the days 'when bad weather was just bad luck and good weather could be a sublime experience'. The work's 11 movements, which have the rough outlines and even the feel of a Bach cantata – the recitatives replaced by short, simple movements called 'Clouds' – feature the university's Chorale and its new-music ensemble, Birds on a Wire. *It All Adds Up* is a suite of six short pieces for two pianos arising from a graduate seminar Lansky taught at Princeton in 2005, 'navigating the area between tonal and post-tonal harmonies'; the performances by Susan Grace and Alice Rybak transform

theory into engrossing musical facts. Whether recorded in Kalamazoo, Waco or Colorado Springs, the sound is of audiophile quality throughout. **Laurence Vittes**

## Sabey

Owl<sup>a</sup>. Ecstatic Aspen<sup>b</sup>. Phoenix<sup>c</sup>. Espejismo<sup>d</sup>.

Arc Flicker<sup>e</sup>. Winter Shore<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Reiko Manabe *fl* <sup>c</sup>Felix Olschofka *vrn/elects*

<sup>b</sup>Hilary Demske *pf* <sup>d</sup>Pablo Gomez *gtr/elects*

<sup>a</sup>Arditti Quartet; <sup>e</sup>ensemble / Efrain Guigui

Albany © TROY1560 (68' • DDD)

<sup>f</sup>Recorded live at Wellesley College, 2006



San Francisco State University's Benjamin Sabey writes music that reveals a brilliant technique and a keen ear for sound, timbre and arc, which makes each of these six pieces a unique experience, riveting and comprehensible in its own self-referencing universe. They are not easy listening – and they may be serving as exercises for larger works to come – but they are already musical to their very core.

A composer on whom Roger Reynolds was the major influence, the newly tenured Sabey offers two works for solo instrument with interactive electronics, *Phoenix* for violin and *Espejismo* for guitar, that are particularly intriguing. Both Felix Olschofka in *Phoenix* and Pablo Gomez in *Espejismo* have sole control of the live signal processing, and the results, whether the human or the electronics are in charge, spin out musical lines, often charged with beauty, that are inevitable even when desperate or chaotic. The purely acoustic music is no less resourceful. In *Ecstatic Aspen*, pianist Hilary Demske navigates a score with no rests or ties, with note-heads floating between stems; in which the composer expects the moment, the hall and the instrument to function as spontaneous players. In *Arc Flicker*, flautist Reiko Manabe gently lays out a landscape of beautiful, fragile pain.

The title-track, *Winter Shore*, is a *tour de force* for a virtuoso sextet which, according to Michael Hicks's poetical booklet-notes, 'sonically inspects and inventories the plots and subplots of the drama of cold ocean confronting land'. **Laurence Vittes**

## 'The New American Art Song'

RI Gordon *Quiet Lives*<sup>a</sup> Heggie *Of Gods and Cats*<sup>b</sup>. Grow old along with me!<sup>b</sup>

Liebermann *Night Songs*<sup>c</sup> Roven *Songs from the Underground*<sup>d</sup>

Daniel Okulitch *bar*<sup>a</sup> Ricky Ian Gordon, <sup>b</sup>Jake Heggie, <sup>c</sup>Lowell Liebermann, <sup>d</sup>Glen Roven *pf*  
GPR © (71' • DDD)



What's particularly new about 'The New American Art Song', an absorbing disc

featuring the outstanding Canadian baritone Daniel Okulitch? The selections, for sure, are recent creations by American composers Ricky Ian Gordon, Jake Heggie, Lowell Liebermann and Glen Roven. But are these works innovative in any ways that set them apart in the genre of contemporary art song? Maybe not, yet the 29 pieces that Okulitch performs, with each composer as pianist, are beautifully crafted settings of verses by an array of celebrated and lesser-known poets. All are cast in an accessible tonal style with keen attention to words and vocal shapes. They're songs that would be welcome on a recital programme alongside repertoire new or old, American or otherwise.

Gordon's *Quiet Lives* explores people on the edge of society, and its eight songs, exultant and touching, include several to texts by Dorothy Parker (not in witty mode) and Langston Hughes. The Heggie cycle *Of Gods and Cats* consists of two charming songs set to lyrics by Gavin Geoffrey Dillard that are almost over too quickly. (Happily, Okulitch ends the disc with another Heggie piece, the glowing 'Grow old along with me!', set to Robert Browning.) Far more expansive, Roven's cycle *Songs from the Underground* comprises 15 songs – both dramatic and comedic – which reveal a vivid musical imagination. Liebermann's three *Night Songs* are effusions of lyricism.

Okulitch uses his rich baritone with sensitivity and flair, savouring the nuances in these fresh songs in close collaboration with their respective composers.

Donald Rosenberg

## 'Paganmania'

Al-Zand Paganini *Reverie* Beaser *Pag-Rag*

Ha Scène V *Jing Jade Clappers* Mobberley

Capricious *Invariance* Nistades *Niccolo*

Prangcharoen *Pact Ink*

Christopher Janwong *McKiggan* *pf*

Albany © TROY1543 (63' • DDD)



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Spreading the gospel of classical guitar: Sharon Isbin, subject of a new documentary on VAI DVD and blu-ray, pictured here with Steve Vai

piano works. About halfway through Robert Beaser's three-minute *Pag-Rag*, the dark, oblique piano-writing gives way to more direct and exuberant material as the theme establishes itself more clearly. By contrast, Moon Young Ha's *Scène V* obscures Paganini's tune within a sparse, slow-moving piece that one might mistake for the seven-minute abridgment of an hour-long Morton Feldman epic. Karim Al-Zand's *Paganini Reverie* evokes not so much a dream as a hypnotic state, interrupted by declamatory Messiaen-like chords. In *Pact Ink*, Narong Prangcharoen wallows in grey, dissonant waters before directly settling upon the theme and getting to the point.

By contrast, Zhou Jing slices and dices the theme into seemingly unsettled yet fiercely concentrated chordal components. Little tangible relationship between spoken text and solo piano can be gleaned from S Peace Nistades's *Niccolo*, which is packed with stock-in-trade new-music gestures (accelerating repeated notes, dissonant high-register noodling and so on). After listening, however, I read the booklet-notes, and discovered that the music derives from a film score for piano and orchestra, and that Ian Yen-Chu Chen arranged it for piano solo. James Mobberley's *Capricious Invariance* opens

with the theme in quasi-minimalist dress. Two-handed modal flourishes suggest an exotic, sweeping climax, yet the music remains calm before it eventually turns fragmented and abstract. In this context, the final peroration's chords, scales and arpeggios seem forced and obligatory.

In any event, Christopher Janwong McKiggen's masterful, highly contrasted and sharply characterised performances are superbly engineered. **Jed Distler**

## Sharon Isbin: Troubadour

A film by Susan Dangel

Including music by Albéniz, Jobim, Mangoré,

Lauro and Mark O'Connor

Sharon Isbin *gtr*

VAI  DVDVAI4580

(86' • NTSC • 16:9 • Dolby stereo • 0)



Sharon Isbin has been an acclaimed figure in the world of classical guitar for three decades but there's much more to her artistry than six strings. She has commissioned numerous works for the instrument and guided a generation of students as head of the guitar departments at the Juilliard School and Aspen Music Festival.

And that's only the start, as the winning documentary *Sharon Isbin: Troubadour* makes clear. Peripatetic and seemingly tireless, Isbin spreads the gospel of the classical guitar in a field dominated by men as she engages in as many kinds of musical activities as her energy and gifts will allow. Produced by Susan Dangel and imaginatively (sometimes giddily) photographed by Rob Fortunato, the documentary follows Isbin as she performs, teaches, collaborates, consults and jams with colleagues in the classical, rock and jazz worlds. The cast of characters ranges from such composers as John Corigliano, Joan Tower, Christopher Rouse, Tan Dun, conductor Leonard Slatkin and actor David Hyde Pierce (hilarious on the subject of Isbin as apartment neighbour) to eminent figures in popular music, including Joan Baez, Steve Vai and Stanley Jordan.

There are scenes of Isbin playing at the White House, taking a trip back to Italy (where her love of the guitar was kindled as a child), tripping the light fantastic with a dance instructor and discussing her sexuality (she came out as gay in 1995). Along with the documentary, the DVD includes Isbin performing a range of music, a testament to her curiosity, imagination and mesmerising command of those six strings.

**Donald Rosenberg**

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## Two announcements end months of speculation

After months of speculation, the announcement finally arrived. Many words over many months had been written examining the possibilities, and so audiences around the world, sitting in front of their computers and waiting patiently for the live-streamed press conference to begin, were eager to discover how their listening lives were about to change.

At this point, the story goes in two very different directions. Let's start with the live stream from San Francisco, where in early June senior Apple executives, shirts untucked and high-fives at the ready, unveiled before an assembled audience of technical developers their next big step in online listening: Apple Music. Most Apple initiatives – iPod, iTunes, iPhone, iPad – have either kick-started, or arrived in the early days of, a technological trend. In this instance, they'd been beaten to streaming by services such as Spotify, Qobuz and Tidal. Apple's offering needed to be bigger and better to reclaim lost ground: by the time you read this, it will have launched and you'll have your own views on whether it's succeeded.

Playlists and listening suggestions are clearly a key part of the service. I'd love to see Apple being bold and creative in this area, proposing classical tracks to users they identify as among the more exploratory, helping to bridge those artificial borders between genres, ones largely defined back in the days of purely physical sales when companies needed to know which bit of a shop to stock something in. Given the millions who are likely to use Apple Music, what an amazing opportunity this could be to reinstate classical as



Martin

being serious music for the culturally curious, not merely a specialist genre sidelined by the uninitiated. Time will tell.

Back to that live-streamed announcement, this time with shirts tucked in (though still open-necked – this is 2015) and the more familiar formalities of a traditional press conference, as the Berlin Philharmonic announced its new Chief Conductor, Kirill Petrenko. This was more of a surprise, but that in itself bodes well. In life an obvious choice can sometimes be a lazy choice: a less obvious one generally stems from careful consideration and special insight. Again, time will tell.

So, two very different announcements, relating to two very different organisations, not least when it comes to time-scales. Petrenko doesn't replace Sir Simon Rattle until 2018 – three years is an incredibly long time in the digital world, and by then something completely unheralded may have once again radically altered how we buy and hear music.

And yet there's something of the ethos of Apple's innovativeness lurking in the Berlin Philharmonic – its Digital Concert Hall has set the bar impressively high for how an orchestra can harness the web to reach new audiences. Perhaps more unites these two organisations than just the fact that both announcements were delivered in the same way. And finally, what does it say about how rapidly the way in which we engage with music is changing in that it seemed perfectly normal, entirely unremarkable in fact, that both announcements were live-streamed?

[martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com](mailto:martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com)

## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

**JEREMY DIBBLE**

is the author of this month's Collection on Bax's *Tintagel*. 'One of the classic 20th-century

English tone-poems, it's full of majestic impressions of Cornwall's commanding seascape and its mystical castle ruins,' he says. 'It is also one of the most brilliant examples of the composer's phenomenal orchestral technique.'



inherent Finnishness,' says **ANDREW MELLOR**, who has written this month's cover story on the Finnish composer whose 150th anniversary is celebrated this year. 'It was fascinating to delve deeper into the woods.'

**JOSHUA KOSMAN**

the writer of this month's Musician and the Score, has covered classical music for the

*San Francisco Chronicle* since 1988. He was delighted to peruse Ravel's score with mezzo Susan Graham: 'Going through *Shéhérazade* with her was like travelling through a city with an inspired and enthusiastic tour guide,' he says.

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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LIVE FROM THE *Verbier festival* 2007

# MARTHA ARGERICH



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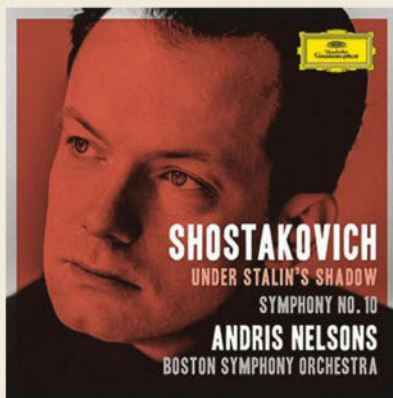


# GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

**Martin Cullifford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



## SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No 10.  
Lady Macbeth –  
Passacaglia  
Boston Symphony  
Orchestra /  
Andris Nelsons  
DG Ⓢ 479 5059GH  
► **EDWARD  
SECKERSON'S  
REVIEW IS ON  
PAGE 20**

Powerful and beautifully crafted, this recording – the first from the relationship between DG and the Boston Symphony under Nelsons – is a hugely impressive sign of just what this ensemble/maestro partnership may go on to achieve.



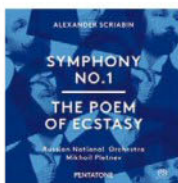
## BRUCKNER

Symphony No 1  
Netherlands Radio  
Philharmonic Orchestra /  
Jaap van Zweden  
Challenge Classics Ⓢ

CC72556

Van Zweden completes his journey through Bruckner's symphonies with a richly detailed, passionately played First.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 24**



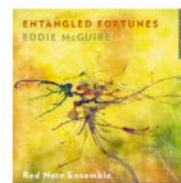
## SCRIABIN

Symphonies Nos 1 & 4  
Russian National  
Orchestra /  
Mikhail Pletnev  
Pentatone Ⓢ

PTC5186514

The Scriabin centenary offers an excellent chance to reassess his creativity: this is a fine contribution to that endeavour.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



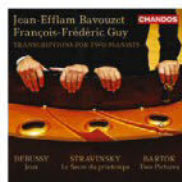
## MCGUIRE

Chamber Works  
Red Note Ensemble  
Delphian Ⓢ DCD34157

A beguiling, lyrical grace

weaves through much of this Scottish composer's chamber music, and these performances well capture its questing expressiveness.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



## STRAVINSKY

The Rite of Spring, etc  
François-Frédéric Guy,  
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pfs*  
Chandos Ⓢ CHANIO863  
Fabulous playing

from a pair of completely on-form pianists, which lends *The Rite of Spring's* rhythmic themes a quite thrilling intensity.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



## JS BACH

'Bach in Montecassino'  
Luca Guglielmi *org*  
Vivat Ⓢ VIVAT108  
A true recognition of Bach's genius

took some time, but these works were circulating shortly after his death and are here wonderfully played on an organ of the era.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



## BEETHOVEN

Missa solemnis  
Sols; Bavarian Radio  
Symphony Orchestra /  
Bernard Haitink  
BR-Klassik Ⓢ 900130

Haitink at 85 makes his first recording of one of music's choral masterpieces – and what a wonderful performance his wisdom and experience offers.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



## SCHOENBERG

Gurrelieder  
Sols; Cologne Gürzenich  
Orchestra / Markus Stenz  
Hyperion Ⓢ 2  
CDA68081/2

Excellent performances throughout from orchestra, soloists and choruses – rarely have the lush textures of Schoenberg's late-Romantic cantata sounded this fresh.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**

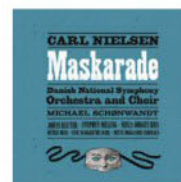


## M STEINBERG

Passion Week  
Cappella Romana /  
Alexander Lingas  
Cappella Romana  
Ⓢ CR414CD

A deeply moving, serene performance of the last major sacred work composed in Soviet Russia, one which until recently languished in obscurity.

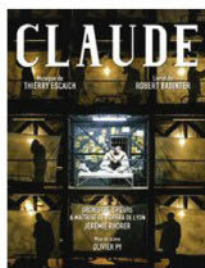
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



**NIELSEN** Maskerade  
Sols; Danish National  
Symphony Orchestra /  
Michael Schönwandt  
Dacapo Ⓢ 2  
6 220641/2

As with Scriabin, Nielsen's anniversary invites us to reassess the composer with new recordings, in this case a fourth – and successful – outing on disc for *Maskerade*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**



## DVD/BLU-RAY

**ESCAICH** Claude  
Sols; Orchestra of the Opéra de Lyon /  
Jérémy Rhorer

Bel Air Classiques Ⓢ DVD BAC118

A modern opera in a production that doesn't shy away from the brutality and bleakness of its story and message.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



## REISSUE/ARCHIVE

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APR Ⓢ 2 APR6017

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► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



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# FOR THE RECORD



Kirill Petrenko: 'I will do everything in my power to be a worthy conductor of this outstanding orchestra'

## Kirill Petrenko is the surprise choice for top job at the Berlin Philharmonic

**T**he next Chief Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and succeeding Sir Simon Rattle, is Kirill Petrenko.

Upon the announcement, Petrenko said: 'Words cannot express my feelings – everything from euphoria and great joy to awe and disbelief. I am aware of the responsibility and high expectations of me, and I will do everything in my power to be a worthy conductor of this outstanding orchestra. Above all, however, I hope for many moments of artistic happiness in our music-making together which will reward our hard work and fill our lives as artists with meaning.'

Petrenko has built his reputation as a conductor in the opera house. His first formal appointment was as General Music Director at the theatre in Meiningen (with his most notable achievement there being the staging of Wagner's *Ring* in 2001). From there he moved to the Komische Oper in Berlin,

where he served, from 2002 to 2007, as General Music Director. Several seasons as a guest conductor followed, including performances with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the LPO. Petrenko was in the pit for Frank Castorf's controversial production of *The Ring* at Bayreuth in Wagner's bicentennial year. In 2013 Petrenko became the General Music Director of the Bavarian State Opera.

Petrenko has made relatively few recordings, but his disc of Pfitzner's *Palestrina* was highly praised by Mike Ashman in 2012: 'Petrenko matches Rudolf Kempe's recently rediscovered 1955 Salzburg performance: they're both compelling story-tellers of large-scale operatic narrative who can mix and match dialogue scenes with varied tempi and dramatically appropriate orchestral balance.'

## Classical music recognised in Queen's birthday honours

**T**he Queen's birthday honours list has made amends for the recent lack of classical musicians by recognising a trio of composers. James MacMillan and Karl Jenkins both received knighthoods 'for services to Composing and Crossing Musical Genres', while Mark-Anthony Turnage received a CBE.

Sir Neville Marriner, who was knighted in 1985 – and who, last year, was awarded an Outstanding Achievement Award at the *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards has been made a Companion of Honour (of which there are only 65 at any one time).

Clarinetist and conductor Michael Collins received an MBE, as did Michael Boehmann, Professor of

## Harding takes Music Director role at Orchestre de Paris from 2016

British conductor Daniel Harding has been appointed Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris; he will take on the new role from the 2016/17 season. Harding will succeed Paavo Järvi but will also continue in his position as Principal Guest Conductor of the LSO.

Harding said of the appointment: 'The orchestra is in a great shape, but with an exciting desire to be challenged and to continue growing. The newly opened Philharmonie is an exquisite concert hall and a very clear symbol of the desire to connect the orchestra with the diverse communities in the city.'

When it comes to recording, Harding has built an outstanding body of work. Recent and notable recordings include Schumann's *Scenes from Goethe's Faust*, which was *Gramophone*'s Recording of the Month in December 2014, Beethoven's Piano Concertos Nos 3 and 4 with pianist Maria João Pires (an Editor's Choice in October 2014) and Bartók's Violin Concertos Nos 1 and 2 with violinist Isabelle Faust (which was nominated for a *Gramophone* Award last year).

## Nadine Koutcher triumphs at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

Soprano Nadine Koutcher has won BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2015, with baritone Amartuvshin Enkhbat taking the Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize.

Born in Minsk, Belarus, Koutcher studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory and made her debut as Violetta in *La traviata* at the Mikhailovsky Theatre, St Petersburg, in 2009. She can be heard on 'Rameau - The Sound of Light' (Sony Classical,

violin and chamber music at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.

A CBE went to Simon Halsey, whose commitments include Chorus Director of the CBSO Chorus, Artistic Director of the Berlin Philharmonic Youth Choral Programme and Chief Conductor of the Berlin Radio Choir. Max Hole, Chairman and CEO of Universal, also received a CBE.



1/15) with MusicAeterna and conductor Teodor Currentzis.

### James Conlon is first American to be Turin's Principal Conductor

James Conlon has been announced as the new Principal Conductor of Turin's Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI. He takes up the appointment at the start of the 2016/17 season. He has appeared with the orchestra regularly as a guest since 2009.

Conlon, the first American to head the ensemble in its 84-year history, has held posts as General Music Director of the City of Cologne (1989-2002), Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra (1983-91) and Principal Conductor of the Opéra de Paris (1994-2004). Conlon has been Music Director of Los Angeles Opera since 2006, the Ravinia Festival (summer home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) since 2005 and the Cincinnati May Festival since 1979.

### Vote for Gramophone's Artist of the Year 2015!

There is still time to register your vote for this year's *Gramophone* Artist of the Year. Visit [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) to discover who the nominated artists are and vote for your favourite. Voting closes on July 31.



Apple's CEO Tim Cook (left) unveils Apple Music

## Apple launches new streaming service: Apple Music

Apple recently unveiled Apple Music, the latest – and a highly significant – offshoot in its music offering. The announcement came as part of its latest Developers Conference, hosted by CEO Tim Cook in America.

Why significant? When launched, iTunes – in conjunction with the company's iPods – radically transformed the music industry, the way people bought music and what constituted a 'record' collection. It was the start of a switch for many music buyers from physical to digital (or, more accurately, to virtual). 'We've had a long relationship with music, and music has had a rich history of change, some of which we've played a part in,' said Tim Cook, with a certain degree of understatement – at least from a technological point of view.

However, in more recent years, Apple's download-only model has begun to see increasing competition from streaming services such as Spotify, Qobuz and, more recently, Tidal among listeners who appreciate, for a fixed monthly subscription price, the flexibility of access to pretty much anything they might choose to listen to. This is about to change as the company launches Apple Music.

Subscribers to the service will have access to 'tens of millions of tracks in the iTunes library', with the service priced at (for US buyers) \$9.99 per month. (UK prices haven't been announced but the price will clearly compete with existing rival services). For \$14.99 a family can have up to six accounts, each with its own library and recommendations.

Other significant features include 'tens of thousands of music videos' (competing with another rival service, YouTube), and the opportunity for unsigned artists to make their music available. It's also hoped that artists will use it as a further way to engage with their audiences by offering behind-the-scenes photos and lyrics, for example. The service will be available from June 30 in more than 100 countries for users of Apple devices, and from the autumn for Android users. The first three months of the service will be free.

## GRAMOPHONE Online

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### PODCASTS

In the latest *Gramophone* Milestones Podcast (in association with sponsors EFG International), Dame Emma Kirkby talks to *Gramophone's* Editor-in-Chief James Jolly about her life and career. Also, turn to page 54 to read Lindsay Kemp's survey of Kirkby's greatest recordings.



### COMPOSER GUIDES

The best way to explore [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) is through the composer pages. Every composer whose music has been reviewed in *Gramophone* since 1983 has their own unique homepage: here, you'll find the Latest Reviews carousel, which allows you to discover the most recent recordings of music by that composer and to go directly to full reviews of each disc.

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Featuring more than 30,000 original *Gramophone* reviews (stretching back to 1983) in a fully searchable database complete with comparative recordings, links to retailers and full recording details, this database is the ultimate resource for anyone interested in classical music recordings.



Jean Sibelius  
with grand piano  
Jean Sibelius

# FINLAND'S *musician of the forests*

Sibelius has become almost inseparable from the Finnish landscapes that surrounded him. As we celebrate his 150th anniversary year, and Finland approaches the centenary of its independence, Andrew Mellor explores how his music's 'Finnishness' can prove a challenge for its interpreters

Some time around 9pm on April 28, 1892, Jean Sibelius unveiled his suite of symphonic movements entitled *Kullervo* in Helsinki. The implications for Finland and Finns were seismic; by the end of the performance, many believed they had glimpsed the essence of their homeland in musical form for the first time. But some sounded notes of caution. The next morning the critic Karl Flodin politely suggested Sibelius prove himself with another subject from Finland's national poem *The Kalevala*: the sorry tale of the doomed hero Lemminkäinen.

Flodin's remark in the *Nya Pressen* newspaper was first and foremost a challenge: if Sibelius were really able to translate the strange world of *The Kalevala* into the international language of music, he'd need to do rather more than place the distinctive, recitative-like 'runic' singing tradition of the Karelia district of Finland into an episodic musical structure reliant on human voices for narrative and stylistic support (as he'd done in *Kullervo*). But Flodin's words were also symptomatic of a country gradually awakening to ideas of autonomy and collective pride. In Germany, no critic would have commanded a composer choose a theme thus. In Finland, it was part and parcel of what was fast becoming a national project.

According to his biographer Glenda Dawn Goss, Sibelius probably had Lemminkäinen in mind already; his friend, the

artist Axel Gallén, had just started work on a series of paintings based on the story. Either way, by 1896 Sibelius had finished his four orchestral 'Legends'. And a more Finnish story he could hardly have unearthed, even within the pages of *The Kalevala*. The dashing young hero Lemminkäinen must cease his gallivanting and undertake three tasks set by Dame Louhi to win the hand of her daughter: ski down the elk conjured by the evil demon Hiisi; bridle Big Brown, Hiisi's wayward steed; and shoot dead with a single arrow the Swan of Tuonela that glides on the death-dark river.

What's so telling about that phantasmagorical 'to-do' list is just how idiosyncratically Finnish it seems even in 2015, 150 years since Sibelius's birth. You could easily catch Lemminkäinen's tasks subconsciously reflected in an afternoon reality show on Finnish television, or his skiing and shooting skills formalised in the winter sports events so beloved of Finns (though rest assured the swan, Finland's national bird, is now protected). Unusually, Sibelius had been prescient. Finland's relative prosperity under Russian control would be fatefully undermined from 1898 with the arrival from St Petersburg of the new Governor-General Nikolay Bobrikov, who placed sanctions on Finnish culture and effectively shut down its press. Well-attended sports events – cross-country skiing in particular – became hugely popular as Finns were forced



'Lemminkäinen's Mother' by Axel Gallén: in this scene from *The Kalevala*, Lemminkäinen has been shot dead by an arrow and his mother is about to bring him back to life

to build up resilience in preparation for a fight. But choosing a timely subject from *The Kalevala* was the easy bit, whether or not Sibelius had read Flodin's instructions in the *Nya Pressen*. The real task lay in the technical gauntlet Flodin had thrown down: was this Swedish-speaking Finnish composer able to move his musical realisation of his national folk culture on from *Kullervo* – to realise something of true symphonic and even 'international' musical value that would remain somehow inherently Finnish?

The music Sibelius created in his four *Lemminkäinen Legends* suggests he absolutely was. And that's of vital significance to any idea of 'Finnishness' in Sibelius's work, particularly as his country toted up the profit and loss account of its cultural worth in the years 2015 and 2017 ('Sibelius year' and 'centenary year' respectively). In *Kullervo*, Sibelius acted on his experience of hearing Larin Paraske demonstrate her storytelling in the runic singing style for an audience of metropolitan artists in search of a vernacular hook for their work. In his score, Sibelius's male chorus sings in runic rhythms and twists around three adjacent notes over characteristic drones (for chapter and verse on Paraske's possible influence on the fabric of *Kullervo*'s music, see Goss's outstanding study, *Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland*; Chicago University Press, 2009). Even to foreigners, the ski jump-shaped lamenting intonation of

Finnish words is clearly audible in *Kullervo* – consciously placed there by a composer whose mother tongue was Swedish.

But in the *Lemminkäinen Legends*, Sibelius, the Europe-trained composer enraptured by Wagner and Liszt, needed to do rather more. Across the huge span of 'Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island' (the first Legend, or 'movement'), Sibelius uses similar pedal notes and adjacent notes – and a tripping, ornate

*'Finnish was in Sibelius's DNA – there's a distinctively Finnish linguistic rhythm in the First Symphony' – Robert Spano*

theme described by conductor Hannu Lintu (whose Ondine recording of the *Legends* with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra was reviewed last month) as 'absolutely Karelian, without a doubt' – but forms from them an astonishing 17-minute musical arc. It meets all the questions of German symphonic working-out head-on yet with a strikingly different method, one in which the function entirely dictates the form.

If we're talking about national identity, it's all there in 'Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island': the chirruping birdsong that formed Sibelius's earliest 'imagined' compositions; the pedal and recitative-like adjacent notes of the runic singing tradition; an opening that speaks of the 'oppressed self-confidence' cited by critic Julius Meier-Graefe as characteristic of 19th-century Finnish art; even the eroding of parameters of time and space that Axel Gallén had started to explore in his paintings – the latter reflecting Finland's position

on top of the world, its ever-present horizon (often above a dado rail of forest) signalling both the finite and the infinite.

But in that remarkable stretch of music, Sibelius had done a lot more besides. For Hannu Lintu, 'Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island' is 'absolutely [Sibelius's] first real symphonic composition. I hear for the first time that Sibelius had a gift for thinking in long, long phrases and looking far ahead. From the structure of that first movement you can somehow imagine that the end of his symphonic career will be the Seventh Symphony.'

Lintu acknowledges of that movement that 'the more rhythmic it gets, the more Karelian and the more Finnish it sounds to me'. But as Goss illustrates, Sibelius leapt forward in the *Lemminkäinen Legends* precisely because he proved he could do *more* than write the 'Finnish music' of *Kullervo*. In all four Legends, and notably in 'The Swan of Tuonela', Goss sees 'the inextricable blend of...international currents that were the hallmark of Finnish nationalism in the 1890s'. In other words, Finland's awakening to ideas of freedom was as much about embracing trends from Europe (including nearby Scandinavia) as it was about 'dignifying' vernacular Finnish music with the services of a European-style symphony orchestra, an orchestra the likes of which Helsinki had only just got. Swedish-speaking Finnish composer Sebastian Fagerlund stops short of Lintu's specifics, but talks of how Sibelius had 'this way of drawing and developing musical material, of controlling very broad musical and dramaturgical arcs which remain very relevant to me as a composer', and which, I would add, you can still hear in an awful lot of Finnish music written today. Sibelius's Seventh Symphony might be a distillation of that idea, but you can't get a more obvious manifestation of it than 'Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island'.

So where could Sibelius go next? When he started his seven-chapter symphonic journey in 1898 – shortly after Bobrikov tightened his grip on Finland – would it, could it and should it retain such a Finnish flavour? Robert Spano, Music Director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, is the only American conductor to have recorded *Kullervo*. He sees many of the overtly Finnish elements of that piece in the later works that would become so internationally relevant. 'Finnish was a learned language for Sibelius but it clearly got into his DNA, particularly its rhythmic and stress patterns,' says Spano. 'Just think of "Kullervo, Kalervon poika, sinisukka äijön lapsi" [the first sung line of *Kullervo*, pronounced as it's spelled with an emphasis on initial syllables] and then the main theme of the first movement of the First Symphony, "deeeee daa daa dadadada". It's such a distinctively Finnish linguistic rhythm in that first tune in the First Symphony.'

Maybe. But while Sibelius's methods of construction were to grow evermore universally revolutionary – however much they might have owed to Gallén's paintings or, for Spano, Brahms's motivic integrity and Schoenberg's concision – there were elements of his Finnish upbringing that would remain and blossom, even after Finland woke up to independence on December 6, 1917. Hopping among three adjacent notes with an emphasis on the central one, as the principal themes of *Kullervo* do (Andrew Barnett has coined the useful 'S-motif' descriptor), would become so ubiquitous in Sibelius's output that it's pointless to even start citing examples. Lutheranism – more important in the psyche of Finns 'than in that of any other nation' according to the writer and revolutionary Minna Canth – found its way into the hymn-like striving that so often powers home the symphonies or colours plaintive passages like the 'Song of Praise' from *Swanwhite* (in my mind, among

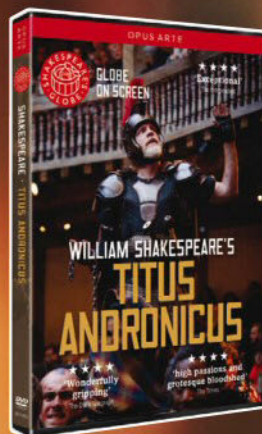
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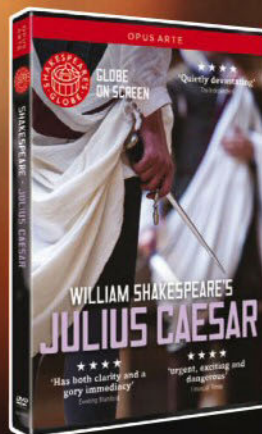
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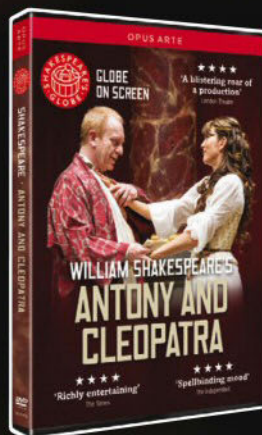
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the most spiritually ‘Finnish’ of all Sibelius’s creations).

It’s when we look to the end of Sibelius’s life, after the seven symphonies and before that tantalising three-decade public silence, that we see the composer turning once more to the stories that had helped him find his Finnish voice. In a Finland increasingly obsessed with the escapism of tango and the movies following the horrors of its bloody 1918 Civil War, Sibelius returned to a work he believed to be ‘nothing but music’ – *The Kalevala*. For Goss, Finland had already decided what Sibelius stood for and placed him ‘in the nation’s display cabinet’ (a Finnish saying, ‘kansakunnan kaapin päällä’). But Sibelius thought otherwise, and was stewing on a series of inward-looking works that would probe even further into the psyche of the very country that was wheeling him out at state occasions like the monarch it didn’t have. One of these works, like the little manufacturing firm established on the banks of the River Nokia in 1868 that would become so emblematic of Finnish innovation and modernism, emerged from the woods: the tone-poem *Tapiola*.

A magical, chilling and thrilling snapshot of Finland’s ‘god of the forests’, *Tapiola* (recently recorded by Robert Spano in Atlanta) introduces a fascinating interpretative debate. In a line you can draw straight back to the *Lemminkäinen* music, *Tapiola* inhabits its own realm where, in a traditional (for which read ‘Germanic’) musical sense, not a lot happens. Much has been written about the primeval forests *Tapiola* reflects, not least how both Sibelius and the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto have managed to recreate the phenomena of Finland’s low winter sun beaming light sideways through such a forest from the horizon rather than from above.

If that’s an elusive effect, for Sibelius more than Aalto, then so is the score for *Tapiola* – so easily understood by Finns but, like the notion of Lemminkäinen skiing down a mythical elk, somehow more intangible for the rest of us. ‘It took us [the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra] longer to get inside *Tapiola* than



*‘I haven’t seen the ancient forests of Northern Finland but I still think I do a pretty convincing Tapiola’ – Hannu Lintu*



From top: another episode of *The Kalevala* by Axel Gallén; conductor Hannu Lintu

it did *Kullervo*,’ says Spano – and that’s despite the latter appearing more ‘international’ and not involving any tongue-twisting Finnish. ‘In *Kullervo* you can still hear who Sibelius is learning from, borrowing from and stealing from. *Tapiola* is an impenetrable forest.’

And therein lies one of the central issues surrounding Sibelius’s music that will be thrown into focus in 2015: the idea of Finnishness in his scores as a barrier to interpretation. In an interview with the *Helsingin Sanomat*’s music critic Vesa Sirén earlier this year, Sir Simon Rattle spoke of the ‘difficulty’ German musicians have with Sibelius’s idiom; for some of us who witnessed the Berlin Philharmonic’s concerts in London not long afterwards, it showed.

‘Sibelius actually had the German symphony orchestra in his mind for the First Symphony but his ideas about texture changed, and that’s the biggest problem for German orchestras,’ says Lintu. ‘In German symphonic music the harmonic structure and especially the vertical line and the counterpoint is more clear. Perhaps the difference is that with Sibelius you really have to know what all the other instruments are doing, how the syncopation works. It really takes time.’

But isn’t it about rather more than time? I was taken to an ancient Finnish forest in Ostrobothnia last November, and it struck me that the peculiar environment was absolutely to *Tapiola* what Aldeburgh Beach is to *Peter Grimes*: a near-indispensible aesthetic reference point.

Lintu, like many Finns, is dismissive of that idea. ‘I haven’t seen the ancient forests of Northern Finland but I still think I do a pretty convincing *Tapiola*,’ he says. ‘It’s a psychological piece, it’s about the parallels between our own lives, nature and *The Kalevala*.’ But perhaps it’s easy for a Finn, steeped in the world of the folk-legend from school, to say that. ‘I’ll bet Hannu’s seen pictures of those forests though, hasn’t he?’ counters Spano. ‘I half agree with him and I know what he means. But I feel I understand *Grimes* differently because I’ve been to Aldeburgh Beach and

I feel I understand Sibelius differently because I've been in a Finnish forest. I don't think you have to go there, but we're suffused with the experiences that make us who we are and I think that's true of Britten and of Sibelius.'

*Tapiola* might have had a harder time than *Peter Grimes* on the international performing circuit, but for the musicians the world over who had Sibelius in their sights as a modernist – from Morton Feldman to Per Nørgård – the work's structural and musical relevance would prove impossible to overlook. 'By the Seventh Symphony he's created a symphonic world that is utterly unique to him,' says Spano, 'a sort of homeopathic symphonic writing, distilled and condensed. I think *Tapiola* does that too, while at the same time being imagistic and representative in the manner of a tone-poem. But I still think of *Tapiola* as the Eighth Symphony and I hear the influence of those techniques in much American music of today – from Christopher Theofanidis to John Adams.'

After *Tapiola* came *The Oceanides* – Sibelius's big 'American' commission – and the offer of the top job at the Eastman School of Music in New York (some of the most acute and fascinating theories in Goss's book surround Sibelius's reasons for declining the offer and the possible effect this had on his work). With Finland free but more splintered than ever, and after a string of empty-feeling patriotic works induced by the state that now paid his salary, Sibelius had refocused on music that bore more relevance for international observers of artistic development than for the Finns now queuing up to jive to imported South American dances. But perhaps his homeland's new plurality helped him. 'Sibelius was increasingly interested in what was happening internationally, in different musical trends, and he used and incorporated that,' says Fagerlund. 'I see that as one of his contributions to Finnish identity.'

Another, perhaps, was that salary itself. It led to Finland's establishing of state stipends for hundreds of composers, and sowed the seeds for the unparalleled musical life and orchestral infrastructure that still exists in the country today. Fagerlund, naturally perhaps as a relatively young Finnish composer, cites this as one of Sibelius's strongest legacies in his homeland. But it's also a tool for many involved in music in contemporary Finland to use this almost obsessive fixation on the past as a springboard to the future. 'In the spirit of Sibelius, let's take the opportunity to bring out much more contemporary music and focus more on aesthetics within the music instead of looking at it from a viewpoint of nationality,' says Fagerlund. 'That would really be the way to go in 2015: much more emphasis on where we're going next.'

And so Hannu Lintu's Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra – with its *Lemminkäinen Legends* recording now in the shops and a full cycle of Sibelius's symphonies ready for broadcast on Finnish television with accompanying documentaries – will be spending the centenary year of 2017 championing 'the living generation: Lindberg, Saariaho and Esa-Pekka [Salonen],' according to Lintu. 'It's wonderful that we have this year 2015 to look back one more time at what Sibelius's motivations were, especially from a Finnish point of view,' he says. 'None of us will forget the meaning Sibelius's work had for the fight, but it's happened, and now it's time to look to the future; if we have to talk about Sibelius, let's talk about him in terms of music history.'

It's hard to argue with that. But for those non-Finns who still experience the magnetic allure of a country whose folk hero skied down an elk, there will always be riches to add to Sibelius's musical apparitions when they're viewed through the prism of Finland – and all that is unmistakably Finnish. **G**

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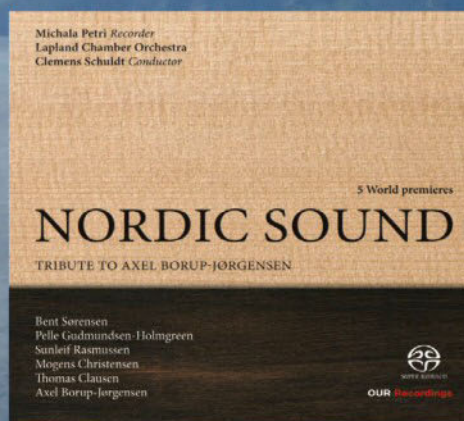
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# SEEKING OUT THE TRUTH IN *Shostakovich's* *symphonies*

Latvian conductor Andris Nelsons has first-hand experience of living under the Soviet regime, which makes him the ideal musician to record a Shostakovich symphony cycle, says Philip Clark

Latvia declares independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, and the world is not as the 12-year-old Andris Nelsons has been led to believe. Lenin is revealed as a false idol. Stalin's murderous legacy is up for urgent discussion. Expressing your Christian faith in church is now allowed, while it transpires that Beethoven's Ninth never was pro-capitalist propaganda. And that man who turns up one day at the Nelsons family home? This is his grandfather who had been 'disappeared' to Siberia 15 years earlier. 'Not an experience he ever wanted to talk about,' Nelsons tells me as we begin to discuss his latest recording project – five releases ready to be rolled out on Deutsche Grammophon under the banner 'Shostakovich Under Stalin's Shadow'.

The first instalment, released at the end of this month, plots the historical trajectory. Marking the moment, composer versus regime, that Shostakovich grasped the depth of his predicament, Nelsons opens with the Passacaglia from his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* – a work denounced in *Pravda* in 1936 as 'petit-bourgeois formalism' – and the ashen-faced, hollow-eyed, perpetually jittery, chain-smoking Shostakovich of popular mythology comes into being. Seventeen years later, in 1953, Stalin – who lurked behind that anonymous *Pravda* byline – died as Shostakovich was working on his Tenth Symphony, the work paired with the Passacaglia on this first CD and which nevertheless, Nelsons tells me, remains riddled with symbolism and harmonic innuendo. Red mists of falsehood had begun to evaporate. But what was to come next – any sense of a new normal – remained far from certain.

In a canny pairing, the Fifth Symphony will be coupled with the Ninth. The Fifth walks like a conventional symphonic structure, but as Shostakovich's retort to Stalin's criticism, talks in bleeps and dashes of encrypted code. And the Ninth sprints, burlesque energy spilling over five movements as Shostakovich tramples wilfully over expectations, post-Beethoven, Bruckner and Mahler, of how Ninth symphonies really ought to behave. The Fifth generally found favour, but his apparently glib Ninth

left the Party questioning his true motives all over again. Both symphonies expertly deflect the apparent meanings of their surfaces.

And Shostakovich's mighty war symphonies – his Eighth (coupled with his incidental music to *Hamlet*) – will follow, leaving Nelsons to wrap up his cycle in the latter half of 2017 with, firstly, the Seventh, and then the noticeably schizoid Sixth paired with the Suite of incidental music from *King Lear*.

Aged 36, Andris Nelsons is proving unstoppable. We meet at his Birmingham hotel the day before he is due to lead a concert performance of Wagner's *Parsifal* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, serving out his notice in grand operatic style with the orchestra he joined as principal conductor in 2008. Nelsons's new orchestra – the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with which he is recording his

*'Shostakovich's music is linked to Stalin, Hitler, these disastrous things...but there's also a part that's independent from politics'*

Shostakovich cycle – appointed him Music Director in 2013; but he's also recently been connected with another plum orchestral post – Principal Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic.

The three Bs? Birmingham, Boston, Berlin? Nelsons's people have made it clear that their man will not be entering into speculation about the Berlin gig during our interview. But as Nelsons talks about Mariss Jansons, the great Latvian conductor some four decades his senior, I do wonder if he thinks a Latvian at the head of the Berlin Philharmonic might represent a certain sweet justice: 'Jansons won the Karajan Competition and was invited to be his assistant in Berlin,' Nelsons reflects rather darkly. 'But the party said, "No, you can't go". He couldn't leave the USSR to perform. This is how the regime messed up personal lives and careers.' (Several weeks after our meeting, the job was in fact given to Kirill Petrenko.)

But Nelsons isn't the first conductor from what would become the Soviet bloc to lead the BSO. Serge Koussevitzky, whose 25-year stint (1924-49) set the standard of the modern orchestra, left his native Russia in 1904, pre-revolution. By the time the BSO cut their debut recording for DG in 1970 – Ives, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas – the Koussevitzky era



Clear vision: Shostakovich was 'basically forbidden' when Nelsons was a child, but the 36-year-old conductor now has his own firm ideas about the composer's music

was, of course, already a far-flung memory; but orchestra and label certainly resonated in sympathy, recordings by Jochum, Ozawa, Kubelík, Giulini and Steinberg rivalling a certain other DG/orchestra affiliation in central Europe.

Is the plan that Nelsons and the BSO might together consciously recapture some of those golden-oldie label days? I hope not. True enough, during the period when Nelsons's predecessor James Levine was at the helm (2004-2011) the orchestra managed only one recording for a major label (of music by Peter Lieberson). But this is no time for sentiment. Nelsons's Shostakovich needs to be allowed to take its own place in time, to offer clean-sheet perspectives from a conductor who himself grew up under the Soviet shadow.

'Shostakovich's music is, of course, connected to everything that was happening around him – Stalin, Hitler, all these disastrous things,' Nelsons says as I ask about how his first-hand experiences of living under the cosh have impacted on his view of the composer. 'You can't avoid these political connections, but there is also a very big part of the music that I hear as

independent from politics – Shostakovich the genius composer despite everything that was happening in the world. There were many composers living and working at that time, but there is no other Shostakovich. Over-politicising his symphonies...well, that is not the only way of describing his work. There is also his unique instrumentation, harmony, his vision of what the symphony orchestra can do – all this is above politics.'

Inside the music though, I suggest, are Shostakovich's strategies for coping with the weirdness of being told that his music was improper, damaging to society and 'wrong'. No one criticised the notes on the page. Perhaps it would have been easier had notes and harmony indeed been the basis of official disapproval – then he could have framed a defence specifically about music. But to be told that the attitude of your work fails to conform to bureaucratic expectations is infinitely more invidious.

'Shostakovich's relationship with Stalin after *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and after he was forced to withdraw his Fourth Symphony was a very personal one,' Nelsons explains. 'Is relationship the right word? It was conflict at a very deep,

personal level. It is a big insult and shock for someone to say to an artist, “Your music is not good enough for our time”, but although Shostakovich was very aware that the regime did not approve of his work, he was also highly patriotic. He was brought up in the Soviet Union after the revolution and, before the disaster of Stalin, was a person of communistic socialist beliefs. He was not trying to leave the country because he thought communism was a disaster. Until a certain moment, he believed.

‘Like me. I believed, too. At school we were fed propaganda. I thought that Lenin was almost like a God. In the first and second grade we were taught that Lenin had been a great student and that we must be like him. And I really believed that as a kid. My parents knew all the history but could not talk about it. And until Stalin destroyed Shostakovich’s belief in the system by announcing that his music was wrong – and until it became clear that he was sending people to Siberia and was just as evil as Hitler – Shostakovich believed. As his Second and Third symphonies tell us, at a certain point he was a true patriot.’

Following the mad-dash luminosity of Shostakovich’s First Symphony, his Second heralds something hitherto untried, the conservatoire niceties of harmony rising from the bowels of the orchestra usurped by a concrete orchestral inscape – belly-gurgles of unruly harmonic reflux. The symphony ends with Shostakovich setting a clanky, iron-fist of a poem by Alexander Bezymensky in honour of the revolution, but compositionally its opening section unveils bold new thinking: Ivesian montages, harmony that trips towards atonality.

‘Already, in 1927, Shostakovich is looking beyond what was already around him,’ Nelsons says. ‘What I find interesting is that the darkness of those colours in his Second Symphony and *Lady Macbeth* have nothing to do with the regime. Shostakovich, as composer, is starting the process of searching for other harmonies and orchestral sounds, looking for ways to express his soul. Clearly he is aware of Mahler – early Schoenberg, too.’

When, given the Party’s censure, did Nelsons first become aware of Shostakovich? ‘From an early age actually – five or six perhaps. He was basically forbidden, but you could buy scores and his music was performed in concerts, although nobody ever said anything about his double meanings or suggested that his music was concerned with protest. The Fourth and Eighth were never performed, but the Fifth and Seventh were regularly played. The Seventh, of course, is Shostakovich at his most patriotic, reflecting on the catastrophe of the siege and blockade of Leningrad. Shostakovich is fighting for his home, his city, his culture. This aspect is beyond politics – but he is also attacking Hitler and Stalin. People have been killed. Fascism



Galvanising force: since 2013, Nelsons has been bringing new audiences to Boston

*‘In the Tenth, he uses his DSCH motif to beat Stalin. You are dead! D-S-C-H! I told you I would survive! D-S-C-H!’*

or communism? It makes no difference to Shostakovich.’

Discussing the Tenth Symphony, I recall something Nelsons mentioned earlier. The propaganda machine, he had said, swiftly turned 360 degrees after Latvia declared its independence. Now capitalism was given the hard sell as some unimpeachable paradise – ‘but it wasn’t a paradise at all,’ Nelsons had told me – and I wonder to what extent the Tenth is a similar expression of personal and political disorientation? ‘It’s premiered just a few months after Stalin dies, but is started while he is still alive,’ Nelsons responds. ‘For an interpreter there are lots of questions.

Do you read the first movement as though Stalin is already dead? Is there hope amongst all that darkness? And to what extent is the second movement a portrait of Stalin? The Tenth Symphony is a moment of transition,

and sometimes actually I feel more hope in the Stalin era symphonies than in his later pieces. The celeste in the Fourth Symphony is taken as being the essence of hope for the future, even though it’s cold; the celeste in Shostakovich always symbolises transcendence.’

I mention the role the instrument fulfils in Shostakovich’s valedictory Fifteenth Symphony, where it chatters in the background as the composer pulls off a final symphonic sleight-of-hand: the only real material in the symphony is the music that Shostakovich has borrowed, from Rossini, Wagner, Mahler et al. The rest is artifice, like the illusion of invention, a rabbit that announces its presence by staying resolutely inside the hat. ‘Nearing the end, Shostakovich looks into himself and straight into the eyes of death,’ Nelsons says. ‘The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Symphonies, the Second Violin Concerto, are all concerned with what happens after this life. Compare that with the Scherzo of the Tenth, with its exaggerated humour suggesting that pretending to be mad might be a better option. It’s sick, unhealthy humour. But after Stalin dies, Shostakovich must think about himself and death. Even after the dictator has gone, he is not really free to write what he likes.’

Nelsons has recorded Shostakovich’s Seventh and Eighth Symphonies before (with the CBSO and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestras respectively), but this new project is the first opportunity for him to flex his interpretative muscles around an all-encompassing, integral cycle. Which is not to say he hasn’t made some very fine recordings already. His 2012 *Also sprach Zarathustra* was the self-recommending first choice when I surveyed Straussian all-comers in a *Gramophone* Collection (A/2014). His Brahms piano concertos with Hélène Grimaud (also DG) have real dramatic muscle, while Sibelius buffs have been waxing lyrical about his new Sibelius Second Symphony on the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s own label, BSO Classics.


Has Nelsons's view of Shostakovich Seventh and Eighth Symphonies changed since his earlier versions? Long pause. 'Constantly things change. Now I would say I look at these pieces from a more distant perspective. The famous march from the Seventh is very easy to take literally, but from a purely compositional vantage it is fascinating how Shostakovich develops it through the orchestra, the form growing from the emotional background.'

I've often wondered about that march. Did Shostakovich model it around anything in particular and, if so, would that reference have been clear to a period audience? 'It's his imagined version of a Soviet march, with chromatic intervals that are entirely his own.' Shostakovich borrows with impunity, I say, but manipulates his *objets trouvés* to the point where he gains ownership of them. 'The sustained strings at the opening of the Fourth Symphony are like an orthodox choir which Shostakovich has coloured with his signature DSCH motif,' Nelsons says. 'In the Tenth Symphony his initials begin sweetly, a little naively even. Then, as it develops, it's like Shostakovich uses them to beat Stalin. You are dead! D-S-C-H! I told you I would survive! D-S-C-H! Even with Stalin dead, Shostakovich keeps repeating his initials – what if Stalin's legacy spreads like an infection? What then?'

We've travelled a long way from *Lady Macbeth's* Passacaglia, and I wonder how difficult a task it is, given its ubiquity and riddles, to play not just the notes of the Fifth Symphony but also crack into its nebulous subtext? Nelsons sings the opening. 'That is like a dictator saying it should be only one way; then an answering phrase transcends above his demands. Shostakovich, as an artist, is trying to intervene. When the piano enters, this is a fight. But when we reach the coda, where Shostakovich uses flute without vibrato and celeste, this is a sign of his belief in a future, whether philosophical or literal.'

'The form is very traditional, with a Romantic sensibility and, it's true, whenever I go to Japan or elsewhere it remains the piece most people want to hear. But it is difficult to read it as a positive symphony. The third movement is so tragic and desolate. And what is the Finale trying to tell us? How does this symphony really end? This marching is like the marching in Red Square – a confirmation of the greatness of communism. In the final two movements of the Sixth Symphony, you hear this hollow, happy music; and the finale of the Fifth is like that too, Shostakovich saying, "I will never give up, you will not win".'

'That the Party was utterly fooled by Shostakovich is perhaps not surprising. His irony is sweet. His sarcasm is not as biting as Mahler. Shostakovich was modest, whereas Mahler was something of a dictator himself. He was, after all, a conductor! But Shostakovich only attacks those who deserve it. He fulfilled the expectations of his time, fooling them as he expressed his protest. But he also expressed his artistic vision – his idea about music and where it should go.'

At the time of writing, Nelsons has just bid farewell to the CBSO with two performances of Mahler's Third. His mission in Boston is, of course, to connect with a fresh audience. 'You have to get them when they're young!' he says. 'As people get older and have children, persuading them to come to classical concerts becomes increasingly tough. So I want to go into schools and tell young people that classical music can be your friend for life.' And what message to those middle-aged parents, that apparently lost generation? 'Even if you come just once a year, please come. This music is your right. And you will be amazed.' 

► To read Gramophone's review of Nelsons conducting the BSO in Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony and the Passacaglia from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, see overleaf

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCO BORGREVE



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# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Edward Seckerson salutes a thrilling first disc in DG's new relationship with  
Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony Orchestra



### Shostakovich

'Under Stalin's Shadow'

Symphony No 10, Op 93.

Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk

District - Act 2, Interlude (Passacaglia)

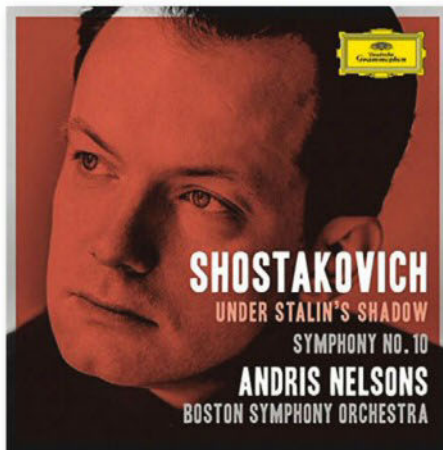
**Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons**

DG © 479 5059GH (65' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston, April 2015

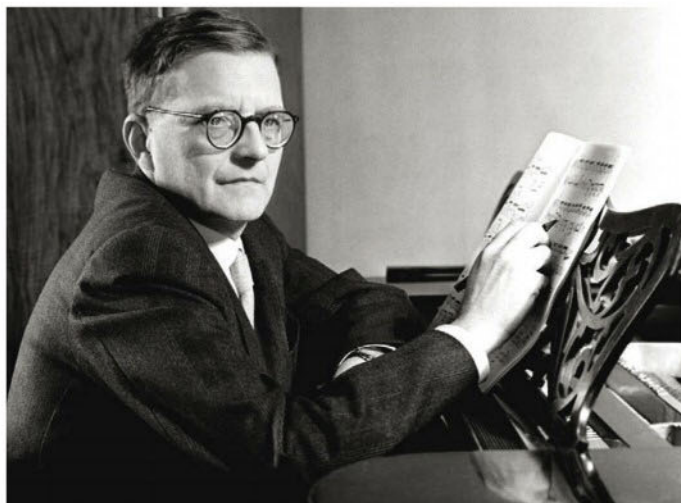
Andris Nelsons's first (live) recording as Music Director of the Boston Symphony is quite something. It carries the title 'Under Stalin's Shadow' though, of course, the Tenth Symphony – premiered just months after Stalin's death in 1953 – was the point at which Shostakovich emerged from that shadow defiantly brandishing his own musical monogram – DSCH – like a medal of honour. But while the Tenth is in itself a before-and-after-Stalin chronicle, Nelsons has added a preface in the shape of the stupendous Passacaglia from the composer's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* – the piece which first found disfavour with the dictator and his regime.

So shock-and-awe arrives with a vengeance in the screaming organ-like chords which portend Katerina Izmailova's destiny – the State bearing down on this liberated woman for the crimes to which she has been driven. It is the musical embodiment of oppression, this extraordinary interlude, and the irony is that Stalin should not recognise it as such but rather find offence in its crushing dissonance. And, my goodness, Nelsons lays down the monster climax with almost obscene relish, howls of derision from the woodwind



*'To say this disc augurs well for Nelsons's future with the Boston Symphony is an understatement and then some'*

choir and the Boston trumpets recalling a thrilling stridency from days of yore when the principal from the Münch and Leinsdorf eras would lend a steely, blade-like gleam to the *tutti* sound.



Emerging defiantly from the shadow: Shostakovich composing at the piano

It's a really affecting segue then from the impenetrable darkness of its closing bars into the long string bass-led introduction of the Tenth Symphony. Nelsons's performance is mighty, marked by a wonderful nose for atmosphere and a way of making space for the succession of desolate wind solos – first clarinet, later bassoons and piccolos.

The inexorability of this beautifully proportioned, arch-like first movement is judged to perfection. There is that forlorn little dance for flute that morphs into a cry of such despair in the huge development climax and later emerges in clarinets striving hope against hope to keep the spirit of optimism alive.

I mentioned the despairing climax of this movement, an upheaval so great and so protracted as to seem insurmountable – but what makes Nelsons so lethally impressive here is the precision with which he addresses every accent, every ferocious *sforzando*. He is the most rhythmic of conductors and the trumpet-topped brass here are possessed

of a unanimity that makes them absolutely implacable.

I should add that every thematic motif, every cross-reference and transformation is clearly delineated. Not in any sense forensic, as in sterile, just startlingly clear. And as Nelsons negotiates the aftermath of this crisis with great intakes of breath from his cellos and basses, we come full-circle into the bleak coda, where two piccolos vainly attempt a consoling roundelay.

The whirlwind *scherzo* ensues – and whether or not this was intended as a



Andris Nelsons: very much at home in Symphony Hall, Boston, in his first disc for DG as the BSO's Music Director, kicking off a cycle of Shostakovich 'Under Stalin's Shadow'

thumbnail sketch of Stalin tearing through the fabric of the symphony is immaterial: something destructive this way comes, and at great speed. Well, more the illusion of speed (emphatic and imperative) because again it's the rhythmic precision, the snap of the syncopations and absolute security in the playing of them that takes the breath away. When the trombones make their invasive presence felt midway through the movement there is more than a hint of Red Army bullyboy tactics in the attitude they convey and, by contrast, Nelsons makes much of that eerie motoric passage in the strings which follows, as if quietly generating more energy for the closing bars.

So much for the 'before'. Emerging from the dust of the *scherzo* comes the 'after' – the composer reasserting his identity in the coded musical form of his own monogram, DSCH. It's there almost before you know it, offsetting evocative horn solos (beautifully attended by the BSO principal) and reiterating

itself through the folk dance at the heart of the *Allegretto*. What a mysterious movement this is (closer to a Mahlerian *Nachtmusik* than anything else in Shostakovich) and how subtly Nelsons explores its shadowy subtext.

I have mentioned the beauty and personality of the wind-playing throughout this performance, and the plaintive oboe solo which first scents a new dawn at the start of the finale is especially poignant. Be in no doubt that this is one of the finest performances that I have ever heard of this great piece (it must surely bid fair for 'best in catalogue') and to say that it augurs well for Nelsons's future with the Boston Symphony is an understatement and then some. This was a shrewd appointment.

Symphony Hall, Boston (modelled after Vienna and Amsterdam) sounds wonderful, too, the thunderous restatement of the DSCH motif at the heart of the finale packing a huge punch and preparing us for the fireworks of the

coda, where defiant timpani have almost the last word with it. Almost, but not quite. Stalin may have been dead but his pernicious legacy was very much alive. **G**

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#### Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Orchestral



## Rob Cowan on a fine New World Symphony from Robin Ticciati:

*'Had this CD been available when I prepared the Gramophone Collection, it would have come fairly near the top'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 27**



## Harriet Smith reviews sparkling Herz from Howard Shelley:

*'Unless your doctor has prescribed some strict froth-free diet, I can heartily recommend a dose of Herz'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 28**

## Atterberg

'Orchestral Works, Vol 3'

Symphonies – No 1, Op 3;

No 5, 'Sinfonia funebre', Op 20

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra / Neeme Järvi

Chandos (C) CHSA5154 (63' • DDD/DSD)



This latest volume in Chandos's Atterberg survey concentrates, as did Vol 2 (3/14), on a contrasting pair of symphonies. The larger is his First (1909-11, revised a couple of years later), in the four expansive movements of which Atterberg's early style and influences – for instance, Sibelius in the *scherzo* – are laid out with disarming openness. If the familiar Romantic ardour and late-19th-century harmonic language are in evidence, what is missing, curiously, is the melodic freshness of the Second Symphony (1911-12) – though the main theme of the finale valiantly, if a touch frustratingly, foreshadows the later work.

Nonetheless, the First Symphony is a rewarding listen, especially in this full-blooded account from the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, and Neeme Järvi has the measure of the composer's style, not letting the occasional structural awkwardnesses get in the way. Järvi perhaps manages the turbulent tonal shifts of the opening bars with slightly more conviction than Rasilainen on his CPO recording, but thereafter the performances run shoulder to shoulder through the score.

It is much the same in the Fifth, *Sinfonia funebre* (1917-22), which was revised repeatedly until 1947 when it reached its final form, as given here. The title and dates of this continuous, tripartite design – and indeed the bracing, recapitulatory 'valse macabre' climax in the third span – might suggest a reaction to the Great War but, as Stig Jacobsson points out in the booklet, it is rather 'a symphony of fear and fright', its motto Wilde's 'For each man kills the thing he loves'. The Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra bring out its wild

moods beautifully, although arguably Rasilainen in Frankfurt catches the nightmarish aspect slightly more vividly.

**Guy Rickards**

*Symphony No 1 – comparative version:*

Frankfurt RSO, Rasilainen (6/00) (CPO) CPO999 639-2

*Symphony No 5 – comparative versions:*

Frankfurt RSO, Rasilainen (11/02) (CPO) CPO999 565-2

## Bartók • Mendelssohn

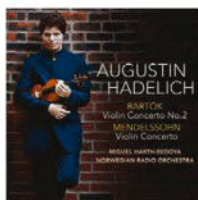
Bartók Violin Concerto No 2, Sz112

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Op 64

Augustin Hadelich *vn* Norwegian Radio

Orchestra / Miguel Harth-Bedoya

Avie (C) AV2323 (62' • DDD)



The musical logic behind this coupling isn't difficult to fathom.

Both Mendelssohn and

Bartók composed two violin concertos, one in their early years (Mendelssohn when he was in his teens), the other in full maturity. The early Bartók work is more distinctive than Mendelssohn's youthful essay, but there is no comparison between the first and second concertos of either composer.

Augustin Hadelich offers a compellingly robust performance of Bartók's Second, alertly accompanied by the Norwegian Radio Orchestra conducted by Miguel Harth-Bedoya. Tempi are well judged, the phrasing nicely shaped as well as clearly articulated, and you leave the work feeling satisfied that what you've heard is what Bartók intended you to hear. The recorded balance confirms that musical sensitivity has been the main priority throughout. But turn to Barnabás Kelemen with the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra under Zoltán Kocsis and you instantly taste the added paprika. The attack of the bow is more varied, the tone edged with folk inflections, and the overall impression idiomatic down to the last semiquaver. Hadelich doesn't quite reach those heights, although he is fully up to the challenge of negotiating the many hurdles and sharp corners that this

wonderful work has in store even for the most accomplished soloist.

The Mendelssohn concerto is similarly satisfying, Romantic in spirit and full of energy, with Hadelich adjusting his approach to suit the music. That might seem an obvious point to make, but not everyone is as versatile. Still, at the final reckoning, good though this coupling is (very good in places), it's not a front-runner among recordings of either work. Kelemen's Bartók comes coupled with flame-fired accounts of the two Rhapsodies, the Second with a cripplingly difficult alternative version of its second movement added as a bonus. It's a fabulous CD, much to be recommended, whereas Hadelich and Harth-Bedoya will appeal primarily to those who fancy this particular coupling, which, as I've already suggested, has its own musical logic. **Rob Cowan**

*Bartók – selected comparison:*

Kelemen, Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis  
(10/11) (HUNG) HSACD32509

## Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 4, Op 58;

No 5, 'Emperor', Op 73

Hannes Minnaar *pf* Netherlands Symphony

Orchestra / Jan Willem de Vriend

Challenge Classics (C) CC72672

(70' • DDD/DSD)



I'm not sure who's the hero of the hour in this recording – the pianist, the orchestra

or the timpanist. Beginning a Beethoven cycle with the Fourth and Fifth Concertos is a bold move but one that pays off in all sorts of ways. In the G major, Hannes Minnaar, just 30, shows great sensitivity in his solo opening, albeit not quite attaining the complexity of feeling implied by both Andsnes and Gilels. I like very much the orchestral response on this new version, the strings veiled, with barely-there vibrato. These are highly characterful readings from all parties – and not in a gimmicky



Hannes Minnaar discusses Beethoven with conductor Jan Willem de Vriend

sense. The opening of the Fourth's slow movement, for instance, is strikingly gruff, with the string phrases abruptly curtailed (the Mahler CO are more sustained here). When Jan Willem de Vriend became Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Symphony Orchestra in 2006 he replaced new for old in the brass section. There is the odd unmanicured moment as a result (13'42" into the first movement of the Fifth, for instance), which may grate with some listeners, though I found it part and parcel of their general approach. The piano passagework, too, invariably bubbles with energy and subtlety of detail in Minnaar's hands, not least in the finale of the Fourth, where the timpani and brass add a pungent earthiness to the proceedings.

The first movement of the Fifth is distinctly more playful than many readings, which again fits with the visceral immediacy of the orchestra's sound world (there's some lovely clarinet-playing here too from around 1'16"). Minnaar is carried aloft by the vibrato-light strings in the slow movement, and if he can't yet unfurl Beethoven's heavenly scales quite as raptly as Andsnes, that will surely come with time. The pacing into the finale is well managed, and again there's a terrific sense of energy and interplay that is very winning. **Harriet Smith**

*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*

*Andsnes, Mahler CO*

(6/14<sup>th</sup>, A/14<sup>th</sup>) (SONY) 88843 05887-2

*Piano Concerto No 4 – selected comparison:*

*Gilels, Philb Orch, Ludwig*


(3/59<sup>th</sup>, 4/97) (TEST) SBT1095

## Beethoven

Symphonies – No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68;

No 8, Op 93

**Beethoven Orchestra, Bonn / Stefan Blunier**

Dabringhaus und Grimm (P)  MDG937 1883-6

(69' • DDD/DSD)



It takes a mere four seconds to fathom the gist of Stefan Blunier's Beethoven Eighth.

A forceful opening, followed by a marked *diminuendo*, leads to mellifluous woodwinds and a strongly accented account of the exposition. The development is taut and propulsive, a muscular traversal (note the hammering timps and trumpets at 5'06") where the strings hold their focus even as the tumult is raging elsewhere. The *Allegretto scherzando* has the air of an elegant 'cock-o'-the-walk' about it, with not a hint of metronomic inflexibility. And the Minuet

is swift, light and admirably transparent, the Trio section taken at a markedly broader tempo than the outer sections, and with excellent horns. Blunier's approach to the finale mirrors his way with the first movement in that the central episodes find the projection toughened, with accents again making quite an impact. The playing of the Beethoven Orchester Bonn is excellent, as it is in the *Pastoral* Symphony, a very different sort of performance, disarmingly gentle and calling on a more modest roster of dynamics (note another remarkable *diminuendo*, this time from 2'20" into the first movement). Lyrical almost to a fault, it's the kind of reading that lets the sunshine in at almost every juncture. The muted slow movement has an enchanting glow; the frisky but considerate peasants make sure not to wake the neighbours with their merrymaking, which makes the storm's fierce onslaught (with thunderclap timps and pulsing basses) all the more dramatic. The finale is played at a leisurely tempo and with disarming simplicity, the articulation admirably precise, especially from the strings.

Altogether a happy coupling, one that avoids the excesses that frequently hamper both modern and period-instrument versions of this glorious work. Balance is I suppose the word I'm looking for, and

that's where Blunier and his players score over many of their more celebrated rivals.

Rob Cowan

## Brahms

Violin Concerto, Op 77<sup>a</sup>.

Double Concerto, Op 102<sup>b</sup>

ab **Erik Schumann** vtr <sup>b</sup> **Mark Schumann** vc

**Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra /**

**Alexander Shelley**

Berlin Classics (P) 0300595BC (69' • DDD)



Erik Schumann gives a most likeable performance of the Violin Concerto. As

an experienced chamber musician, he has a clear idea of when to relax his tone and allow orchestral soloists to come through, yet his more energetic solo music – the first entry, for instance – lacks nothing in passionate, characterful playing. A feature of the performance is the way Brahms's narrative is never allowed to sag or be diverted. In this he shares his approach with the splendid live recording given by Henryk Szeryng in 1967 with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Rafael Kubelík. Leonidas Kavakos's recent account (Decca, 12/13), by contrast, does sometimes allow us to forget that the first movement is an *Allegro*, despite the beauty and finesse of his playing. Alexander Shelley ensures that the orchestra is well balanced, and their exact observance of the dynamics allows Schumann to achieve some magical effects, for example at the end of the *Adagio*, where he's able to drop right down before a final *crescendo*.

Joined by brother Mark, his colleague in the Schumann Quartet, for the Double Concerto, we hear a perfectly matched pair of soloists. This performance, too, is characterised by vigour and controlled momentum, with the lyrical episodes – the first movement's second subject and the quieter parts of the *Andante* – played with unforced tone and gentle singing quality. There may be other recordings (Lisa Batiashvili's of the Violin Concerto on DG, for instance) that give a wider sense of each work's expressive range but these accounts are distinctive, polished and full of vitality.

Duncan Druce

## Braunfels

'Vol 2'

Symphonic Variations on a French Children's Song, Op 15. Sinfonia brevis, Op 69. Der gläserne Berg, Op 39b – Suite

**BBC Concert Orchestra / Johannes Wildner**

Dutton Epoch (P) CDLX7316 (75' • DDD)



Readers coming to this disc through Braunfels's delightful opera *Die Vögel* will

recognise that the composer would be temperamentally suited to writing a set of *Symphonic Variations on a French Children's Song* and a suite from his opera *The Glass Mountain*, inspired by a Christmas fairy-tale. The chirpy theme of the Variations comes from a collection published in 1870 by Widor and is taken at a smart lick by Johannes Wildner and the BBC Concert Orchestra. Braunfels allows the variations that follow to emerge as almost entirely new pieces, each one imbued with an innocence and clarity, winningly expressed.

A guide to the story of the *The Glass Mountain* by Braunfels himself is given in the CD booklet. The music, inspired by titles like 'Will-o'-the-wisp', 'Lady Sun', 'Good Old Moon' and 'The Advent Star' comes from the heart. The suite is given a touching performance, with a number of fine contributions from individual players. In the earlier Variations the trombones form an impressive group, crisply captured by the production team in Maida Vale Studio 1.

The *Sinfonia brevis* comes between these two lighter works with a title that belies its length and the size of the forces gathered together. Written in 1948, it conveys that age of anxiety about which Auden wrote from the other side of the Atlantic. A call sign on wind (2'59" in) and falling string arpeggios suggest the unsettled mood in the pithy opening, a moderately paced *Allegro*. The anguished tone continues in the spacious *Adagio*, where the lyrical passages are turned on their heads by the dramatic episodes; these could sound overwrought in the wrong hands but Wildner seems to have this music in his blood. He brings off the following tricky *Scherzo* with aplomb. The finale, a passacaglia, brings resolution to the foregoing tensions with the assertion of a major chord at the final climax before the quiet ending, most affectingly played. **Adrian Edwards**

## Bruckner

Symphony No 1 (1866 Linz edition, ed Nowak)

**Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra /**

**Jaap van Zweden**

Challenge Classics (P) CC72556 (51' • DDD/DSD)



This release sees the completion of Jaap van Zweden's cycle of the numbered

Bruckner symphonies, a project nine years in the making and split across two record labels. (The earliest symphonies to be recorded, Nos 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9, were released on the Japanese Extone label.) This excellent performance of the First Symphony is a more than fitting conclusion to a series that has grown in stature with each new recording.

Like most conductors, van Zweden has opted to record the symphony in the so-called 'Linz' edition of 1866 rather than the 'Vienna' edition of 1891, and the CD is labelled accordingly. The Linz edition as published in fact contains revisions to the score made by Bruckner in Vienna in 1877 and 1884, a point of detail worth mentioning now that the original 1866 version is available on disc and is increasingly being performed in concert. The booklet-note includes a helpful description of the symphony's extended evolution.

Van Zweden's interpretation is second to none in offering freshness and vibrancy while remaining faithful to Bruckner's markings. Dynamics in particular are carefully observed, ensuring the score's surprisingly rare passages of triple *forte* make their intended effect. The performance of the *Adagio* in particular has a compelling profundity and conviction. The movement's climax might not offer the impassioned intensity that Jochum achieves in his mid-1960s account on DG, but it also avoids the overly free approach to tempo and dynamics that occasionally undermines the earlier performance. Following a taut and energetic interpretation of the *Scherzo*, van Zweden delivers a performance of the symphony's finale – arguably Bruckner's most successful save that of the Fifth Symphony – full of rhythmic drive and excitement.

The playing of the Dutch orchestra is expressive and lithe in every department, the brass in particular offering a satisfying resonance and bite. With warm and clear sound on both CD and SACD layers, it is difficult to think of a finer version of the First Symphony in the catalogue. Highly recommended. **Christian Hoskins**

*Selected comparison:*

BPO, Jochum (9/66<sup>8</sup>, 2/90<sup>6</sup>) (DG) 469 810-2GB9

## Bruckner

Symphony No 9

(1894 original version, ed Cohrs)

**Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra /**

**Simone Young**

Oehms (P) OC693 (59' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Laeiszahle, Hamburg, October 25-27, 2014



Simone Young: persuasive in a live Bruckner Ninth from Hamburg



Early releases in Simone Young's nearly complete Bruckner cycle (only the Fifth

Symphony remains outstanding) were distinguished by their use of the less frequently recorded first editions of the symphonies. I had hoped that Young might similarly differentiate her recording of the Ninth in a crowded market by adding one of the performing editions of the incomplete last movement, but the work is here offered in its traditional three-movement torso.

For the most part, Young directs a well-structured and persuasive interpretation of Bruckner's final symphony, making use of the most recent critical edition available, that of Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs (2005). The *Adagio* in particular unfolds with a sense of flow that is most compelling. Given the competition in the Ninth Symphony, however, a number of factors make a recommendation for this newcomer difficult. One issue is Young's phrasing of the first movement's A major second subject, the brief hesitation on the last note of each bar as distracting on first appearance as it is during the recapitulation. Another is the

somewhat ponderous pacing Young adopts for the *Scherzo*. A slow basic tempo is not necessarily a bad thing in this movement, as Bruno Walter eloquently demonstrated in his 1959 recording (Sony, 6/61), but Young's performance is a shade wanting in vehemence and intensity.

Of greater concern is the relatively limited dynamic range of the sound. One might assume that this is a consequence of the recording's concert origins, but live recordings by the likes of Barenboim (Warner, 5/05), Blomstedt (Querstand, 11/13) and even Horenstein (BBC Legends, 12/01) have no such problems. Here *pianissimos* rarely sound quieter than *mezzo-forte* and climactic passages lack projection and impact. Not only are the coda of the first movement and the great dissonant climax of the *Adagio* distinctly underwhelming as result, but the symphony's serene conclusion also loses much of its mystery and rapture as a result of sounding just that bit too loud.

**Christian Hoskins**

### Chabrier · Debussy · Massenet · Ravel

'France - Espagne'

**Chabrier** España **Debussy** Images - Ibéria  
**Massenet** Le Cid - Ballet Suite  
**Ravel** Alborada del gracioso

### Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Musicales Actes Sud © ASM17 (51' • DDD)

Recorded live 2012-14

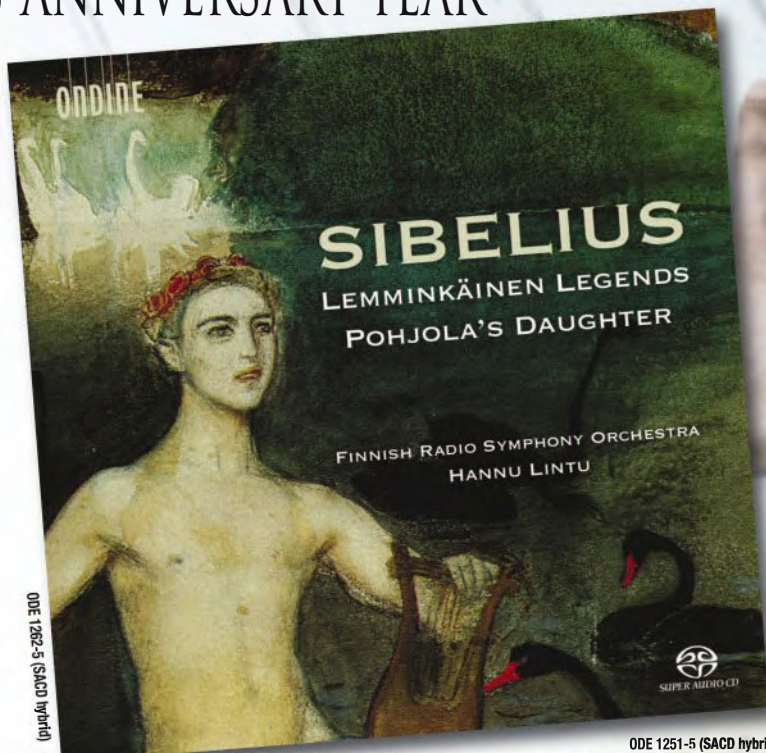


France and French performing traditions have lain at the heart of the discs released

by Les Siècles, whether the repertoire be of music by French composers (Debussy, Dukas) or by composers who happened to have their works premiered in Paris, notably Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*. Les Siècles and conductor François-Xavier Roth have made a point of examining the sort of sound that was prevalent in French orchestras at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries: they use instruments of the period and the strings are strung with gut. But, as is clear from those previous CDs, the resulting performances are by no means the musical equivalent of dusty museum display cases: they certainly contain things that are instructive but they also possess vitality, particularly through the silvery brilliance of the brass instruments and the golden mellowness of the woodwind.

Again, none of this would have much musical or interpretative significance were

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ODE 1213-2

*'In Hannu Lintu's marvellous new recording I hear and admire a rediscovery of the impatience and invention that drove Berio to write it, in the forward, piano-led instrumental balance and the unapologetic grandeur of the finale's climax.'*  
January 2015



*'Lintu's awareness of internal balance is masterly...Messiaen's competing layers dance sensually around each other.'*  
Gramophone  
January 2015

*'This is a wonderful disc containing music by Ligeti from a wide chronological range in exhilarating performances, recorded in perfection.'*  
International Record Review  
January 2014



February 2014



Distributed exclusively in the UK by Select Music and in North America by Naxos of America.

it not harnessed to such positive effect as it is by Roth. Here on this new release he and Les Siècles explore two generations of French composers' responses to Spain with a fine blend of verve and subtlety. The recordings are taken from separate concerts in 2012, 2013 and 2014, but they form a neat package with Chabrier's *España* and the suite from Massenet's *Le Cid* representing the 1880s, together with Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso* and Debussy's *Ibéria* from the generation that followed. The Massenet distils the beneficial qualities of the orchestra's stance, with the delicious liquid flutes and strummed strings, for instance, in the 'Aubade', or the gently piquant cor anglais in the 'Madrilène'. Throughout the programme, luminous sonorities go hand in hand with pliant shaping, affirmative rhythms and lucid textures to bring a refreshing glow to familiar scores. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Dvořák

Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178. American Suite, Op 98b B190

**Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Robin Ticciati**  
Tudor © TUDOR7194 (67' • DDD/DSD)



A big, bold *New World*, this, with a strong bass-line and a

winning approach to the first movement's second subject, where Robin Ticciati eases the pulse and has the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra's strings smile gleefully on a warming *glissando*. The repeated exposition seems to ratchet up the tension a level or two, which adds extra justification for playing it. Most important, Ticciati appreciates the scale of the piece, allowing it to build naturally, patiently and powerfully, and with due appreciation of Dvořák's translucent orchestration.

The (uncredited) cor anglais player in the *Largo* is superb, Ticciati's reading warmly phrased, the acceleration towards the big restatement of the symphony's principal theme (from 7'59" the oboe cheekily bending that initial phrase) infused with genuine excitement. At the point towards the movement's close, when Dvořák passes his most intimate feelings to reduced strings, the playing is warm and affecting. The *Scherzo* is notably high in energy, the dancing alternation of winds and strings within the first minute or so well captured by the engineers, the Trio relaxed but not too broad in relation to the main body of the movement (and note excellent 'pigeon' woodwinds that trill away at 4'06"). Ticciati cues an assertive finale,

resting fractionally between the opening two-note call to arms, so you experience a genuine sense of arrival. Here the strings really dig in and the timps are very cleanly articulated. Once on the road, Ticciati doesn't miss a trick. The clarinet-led second set is very broadly handled (and what playing! – such a breathtaking *pianissimo*), while the music's eventful journey towards that grand denouement, like the first movement's development, is unhurried but very well judged. Had this CD been available years ago when I prepared a *Gramophone* Collection on the *New World*, it would have come fairly near the top of the list, of that I am sure.

The balmy *American Suite* picks up where the *New World* left off, a tuneful 23 minutes' worth that opens like a summer sunset and continues roughly along the lines of the *Slavonic Dances*. Again, Ticciati and his Bamberg players are strong on rhythm, sonority and the music's lyrical slant. A super CD, the symphony a fair match for Sir Colin Davis and the LSO, the Suite making it for me a digital front-runner. More of same please.

**Rob Cowan**

*Symphony No 9 – selected comparison:*

LSO, C Davis (4/00) (LSO) LSO0001 or LSO0071

## Glazunov • Prokofiev • Tchaikovsky

**Glazunov** Concerto ballata, Op 108. Chant

du Ménestrel, Op 71. Mélodie, Op 20 No 1

**Prokofiev** Cello Concertino, Op 132

**Tchaikovsky** Variations on a Rococo

Theme, Op 33. Nocturne, Op 19 No 4

**Jamie Walton** vc

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Okko Kamu**

Signum © SIGCD407 (74' • DDD)



Vilified for the cut-and-paste job that he did on Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo*

*Theme*, Wilhelm Fitzenhagen has to some extent been exonerated by dint of the fact that most performances still use his edition. It's probably heresy to say so but his solution to the ending has never seemed to me particularly heinous. Tchaikovsky's eighth variation (which Fitzenhagen left out altogether) is not especially strong; and by stitching the coda on to what was originally Tchaikovsky's Var 4, Fitzenhagen created a musical momentum that is not at all ineffective. Arguments can readily be aired about whether Fitzenhagen's meddling with the order of the variations elsewhere, together with his repositioning of cadenzas and his

## IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

### • Pentatone projects

The Dutch label has been busy this summer already: **Lawrence Foster** was in the studio in May to record Johann Strauss's *Zigeunerbaron* with the **NDR Philharmonic** and a cast including tenor **Nikolai Schukoff** and baritone **Jochen Schmeckenbecher**, due for release in spring 2016. In June **Kazuki Yamada** recorded a programme of Russian dance music with the **Orchestre de la Suisse Romande**. And **Andrés Orozco-Estrada** is recording Stravinsky ballets, with a variety of couplings, with the **Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra** – likewise for release next spring.

### • Pianistic follow-up

Hyperion is recording a follow-up to **Pavel Kolesnikov's** (pictured) well-received debut disc of Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* (8/14). The young prize-winning pianist will record a programme of Chopin mazurkas in the concert hall at Wyastone Estate in August, for release in spring 2016.



### • Harmonia Mundi news

The autumn will see **Daniel Harding** and **René Jacobs** going into the studio for the French label. Harding will set down Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* with the **Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra** in Stockholm's Berwaldhallen. Jacobs will record Handel's *Water Music* with his **Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin** in the Teldex Studios in the German capital. Both recordings are due for release in summer 2016.

occasional changes to the text are acts of vandalism, though Tchaikovsky himself did not feel strongly enough about it to impose any sort of ban.

Nevertheless, Jamie Walton here rebuffs Fitzenhagen and goes back to Tchaikovsky's original. Walton's taste, discretion and romantic warmth, fused with a lightness of touch, serve as a reminder that it was in the poise and purity of 18th-century music that Tchaikovsky – as he told an uncomprehending Mme von Meck – found solace from life's woes. Even if you are perfectly happy with the Fitzenhagen version, there is plenty of finesse and imaginative spirit in Walton's playing, coupled with the sensitive backing of the RPO, to make this a strong contender in a busy field.

Another favourable facet of the CD lies in the couplings. Glazunov's *Concerto ballata* of 1931, with its roots still firmly set in the 19th century, provides a vehicle for Walton's seamless lyricism and glorious tone, as indeed does the central movement of Prokofiev's late Concertino of 1952, contrasted as that is with the darker, ruminative colours and caustic humour that Walton highlights elsewhere.

Geoffrey Norris

## Haydn • M Haydn • Mozart

**Haydn** Horn Concertos – No 1, HobVllid/3; No 2, HobVllid/4 **M Haydn** Horn Concerto (Concertino)

**Mozart** Horn Concerto, K370b/371 (reconstr)

**Felix Klierer** *h/n*

**Württemberg Chamber Orchestra, Heilbronn /**

**Ruben Gazarian**

Berlin Classics Ⓢ 0300647BC (60' • DDD)



Virtuosity is a remarkable thing and virtuosos remarkable people. Few more so, perhaps, than Felix Klierer (*b*1991), a cornist born without arms, who plays what appears to be an unadapted horn, operating the valves with his left foot. How? He has developed a tripod that clamps the horn at the required position and he sits, hooking his leg on to the instrument's body. He controls tone by regulating lip and air pressure, while long stopped passages are facilitated by a further invention, a second tripod controlled by his right foot. Listeners will have heard him performing Strauss's 'Alphorn' with Christiane Karg (8/14) and may have caught his mixed recital debut disc, 'Reveries', a couple of years ago.

He returns with a disc of Classical concertos – the two by (or associated with) Haydn, one by Haydn's little brother Michael, and a pair of reconstructed fragments by Mozart. Were one to be hyper-critical, one might highlight some rhythmic slackness in shorter note values; but then whose toe-dexterity (for want of a better phrase) could possibly approach Klierer's? Perhaps the dynamic range is somewhat unvaried; although in the Mozart – let's be honest, the best music on the disc – Klierer phrases and characterises most winningly. And to hear how agile he can be at his best, listen to the central *Allegro non troppo* of Michael Haydn's Concertino, which is played with breathtaking accuracy and élan. The Heilbronn players accompany with spirit; there is a prominent harpsichord continuo. Klierer is a remarkable player and it goes without saying that this disc is just as remarkable in its own right.

David Threasher

## Herz

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 66'

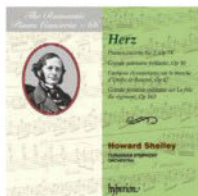
Piano Concerto No 2, Op 74. Grande fantasia militaire sur La fille du régiment, Op 163.

Fantaisie et variations sur la marche d'Otello de Rossini, Op 67. Grande Polonaise brillante, Op 30

**Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra /**

**Howard Shelley** *pf*

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68100 (65' • DDD)



Public taste is a fickle thing. The higher your standing, the greater your fall – pianistic superstars of today take note. As far as 19th-century audiences were concerned, Henri Herz could do no wrong, although he annoyed his more serious counterparts – even Schumann called him a 'talented hack'. Herz's talent (a bit like that of the recently departed James Last) lay not in profundity but in pleasing the crowds, and he did that exceptionally well. Howard Shelley is clearly convinced; this is his third Hyperion disc devoted to Herz's works for piano and orchestra.

Brahms it ain't (and all the better for that, you may well think). There is a high-spirited quality to everything here: even in C minor, the key of the Second Concerto, there's a kind of glee underlying the first orchestral *tutti*. But Herz could also write a gracious tune with the best of them, as witness the lyrical second idea of the concerto's first movement or the aria-like one that opens

the *Andantino*. And it has to be said that his writing for wind leaves Chopin's in the shade – he evidently had a particular fondness for the oboe. If the finale is a triumph of effect over substance, it's engaging enough when played with such élan as here.

The overblown silliness of the percussion and brass opening of the *Fille du régiment* Fantasy gives way to ever more hair-raising pyrotechnics as its variations progress. It ends in a mood of high campery, the triangle player and piccolo player doing overtime. And though the Fantasy on Rossini's *Otello* opens in a darker mood, as befits the subject, it doesn't stay serious for long. Shelley by turns charms and dazzles.

'Chopin', you might think, on hearing the *Grande Polonaise brillante*, but in fact – as Jeremy Nicholas points out in his predictably entertaining notes – this piece predates Chopin's own Op 22 *Grande Polonaise* by several years. It's a real charmer, especially in the hands of such astute musicians.

Unless your doctor has prescribed some strict froth-free diet (and how tedious would that be), I can heartily recommend a dose of Herz.

Harriet Smith

## Jurovski

Symphony No 5, Op 79. Russian Painters

**Norrköping Symphony Orchestra /**

**Michail Jurovski**

CPO Ⓢ CPO777 875-2 (73' • DDD)



Not to be confused with his conductor grandson Vladimir Mikhailovich, or with his son Michail Vladimirovich who conducts on the present disc, Vladimir Mikhailovich Jurovski (as on the booklet cover) or Jurovski (as in the booklet essay) or Yurovsky (as in the reference books) senior was a Ukrainian-born composer, the last of whose five symphonies, here recorded, was completed in December 1971, barely a month before his death at the age of 56. The CD marks the centenary of his birth.

As might be expected of a pupil of Myaskovsky, the musical construction is solid and traditional, in three movements lasting some 45 minutes. The style is eclectic, ranging from Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Myaskovsky himself, through Prokofiev (Symphony No 6) and Shostakovich (Symphonies No 6

and 10, the *Hamlet* film score), and the construction somewhat loose-limbed, especially as regards the 21-minute first movement. An organ entry signals the grand conclusion – ‘aiming at empty pathos’ according to the English version of the booklet-notes, though ‘targeted at’ would be a more precise translation.

The seven ‘symphonic pictures’ that make up the cycle *Russian Painters* resulted from a 1956 Moscow exhibition of artworks on loan from Leningrad; six of the seven paintings are reproduced in black-and-white in the booklet, and all may be found in colour on the web. Like them, the music covers a gamut of appealing traditional Russian idioms, in a kind of latter-day *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Devoted performances and excellent recording make this an attractive disc for anyone interested in the relatively conservative side of Russian music of the Soviet era.

David Fanning

## J López

América salvaje. *Lord of the Air*<sup>a</sup>.

Perú negro. *Synesthésie*

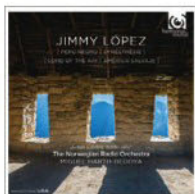
<sup>a</sup>Jesús Castro-Balbi VC

Norwegian Radio Orchestra /

Miguel Harth-Bedoya

Harmonia Mundi © HMU90 7628

(67' • DDD)



Peru may not be noted for a plethora of composers working in the

Western classical tradition but Jimmy López (b1978) seems sure to make his mark on the contemporary scene. Having studied in both Finland and the United States might well have given his music an added range and sophistication, yet an indigenous aura seems never far away in *Perú negro* (2012), with its productive interplay of motivic rigour and emotional intensity taken from traditional Afro-Peruvian songs. The evolution on from *América salvaje* (2006) is instructive, this latter piece having an overtly modernist yet never impersonal demeanour whose recourse to the Andean *pututu* (a type of conch) as a means of heightening expressive contrasts adds to the music's overall pungency.

In between these two works, *Synesthésie* (2011) unfolds a sequence of five miniatures (albeit in duration only) whose evoking of the five senses is achieved with a deftness and impetus redolent of Dutilleux. Inspired by the

majestic flight of the Andean condor, *Lord of the Air* (2012) is a cello concerto of unusually cunning design – its ominous opening movement a prelude to the incisive *scherzo*, succeeded by a slow movement whose impassive eloquence amply evokes the ‘Soaring the Heights’ of its title, before the finale makes terse reference to earlier ideas in a ‘Homecoming’ of tensile resolve. Committed playing by Jesús Castro-Balbi, and unarguably idiomatic response from the Norwegian Radio Orchestra under the watchful guidance of Miguel Harth-Bedoya. Neither the sound quality or booklet-notes leave anything to be desired, resulting in a disc which seems sure to raise López's profile – and deservedly so.

Richard Whitehouse

## Mahler

Symphony No 9

Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra /

Myung-Whun Chung

DG © 481 1109GH (80' • DDD)

Recorded live at Seoul Arts Center,

August 29-30, 2013



Regular readers will have their own pantheon of classic Mahler Ninths. My list

is headed by Abbado and Bernstein. Yours may begin with Barbirolli. And we haven't even arrived at C for Chailly, let alone C for Chung. The Korean conductor, currently embroiled in a bitter battle with the disaffected former manager of his orchestra, has been seeking to make the Seoul ensemble a regional supergroup on a par with Japan's NHK Symphony Orchestra. This is their third release in what looks like becoming yet another Mahler cycle. Very good it is too, up to a point.

Myung-Whun Chung, whose repertoire sympathies are wider than his Messiaen-heavy discography might suggest, has his own way of pacing the argument. The first movement is not just broad but personally inflected in the Bernstein manner. Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra are balder as well as brisker at the start. The second movement is nicely pointed too but by now I was wondering how DG would manage to fit the rendition on to a single sound carrier. The answer comes with the ‘Rondo-Burleske’, its main material sounding like cartoon Hindemith at Chung's breakneck tempo: the movement runs to 12'42" even though the visionary central episode is by no means

# SEATTLE SYMPHONY MEDIA



The latest release from the Seattle Symphony's Grammy-nominated label is a provocative coupling of two great works by European composers reflecting their response to the vibrant culture of the New World. Varèse's *Amériques*, written only 30 years after Dvořák's beloved “New World” Symphony, is a pivotal masterpiece that changed the course of music forever. In live performances of electrifying energy, and recorded in stunning sound, this is a mind-bending combination of masterpieces.



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fast. Whether or not you consider this a viable interpretative gambit, the experience won't leave you indifferent. The finale is also free-flowing if less exaggeratedly so. String textures are confident, even comfy at the outset, perfectly controlled rather than angst-ridden or otherworldly towards the close.

The performance, captured live in fine sound over two nights (despite the dexterity of the playing there were plainly some fluffs which the sound team has attempted to edit), holds its own in a crowded market. The problem comes when you set the results against the timbral individuality and sheer class of Iván Fischer's band.

Ultimately there's not quite enough sonic mahogany in the Seoul Philharmonic's music-making, not yet anyhow. **David Gutman**

*Selected comparison:*

*Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer*

(6/15) (CHNN) CCSSA36115

## Mahler

Symphonies – No 9<sup>a</sup>; No 10 – Adagio<sup>b</sup>

Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Paavo Järvi

Video director **Michael Ciniselli**

C Major Entertainment (F) DVD 729708;

(F) 729804 (136' + 19' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at Kloster Eberbach, Eltville

im Rheingau, Germany, <sup>b</sup>June 28 & 29, 2008;

<sup>a</sup>June 27 & 28, 2009

Bonus: Paavo's Mahler



No previous instalment in Paavo Järvi's Mahler cycle prepared me for the raw passion of this Ninth. The first movement's major/minor episodes veer one to another wildly, with two distinct tempi that threaten incoherence in the movement's convulsive climaxes. The hollowed-out D major of the coda offers more technical than emotional resolution, with a flute solo wandering over the abyss that harks back even more than usual to the 'Bird of Death' episode of the Second Symphony's finale – only this time, there is to be no resurrection.

The centre cannot hold, and yes, the central movements are susceptible to the Yeatsian charge of 'mere anarchy'. The wind band of the Frankfurt orchestra is as 'rough and clumsy' as Mahler could have wished, and the strings lay into the second theme with a passion as unbridled as it is unexpected after the slickly calculated transitions of earlier symphonies, before Järvi accelerates further to mark the strongest possible contrast with the

sentimental gait of the third theme.

Now limping, now falling forwards, the movement proceeds like a village sack race of bizarrely ill-matched participants. The devil takes the hindmost from the first bar of the third-movement fugue, too, but the orchestra hang on to his coat-tails, and Järvi seems determined to make the point that passing casualties of ensemble and coordination are written by Mahler into his chaotic syntax.

Even in the D flat major of the finale, repose is forsaken for the kind of plangent string tone that distinguishes the finale of Järvi's Third. The usual considerations of irony or grief become irrelevant in the face of the coda's grim determination, which reminded me in passing of Haitink's recent way with the piece. Unfortunately, the implications of such an uneasy Ninth aren't pursued by a completed Tenth; however it's done – here, steadily and implacably, with some huge rhetorical caesuras that bely the Wagnerian continuity of the whole – the *Adagio* alone feels more than ever like a failure of commitment to a masterpiece. It makes a frustrating appendix to a patchy but rewarding Mahler cycle. **Peter Quantrill**

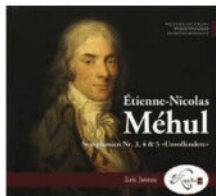
## Méhul

Symphonies – No 3; No 4; No 5, 'Unfinished'

Kapella 19 / Eric Juteau

Kapella 19 (F) 0742832 392211 (61' • DDD)

Available from kapella19.de



Etienne-Nicolas Méhul (1763-1817) was perhaps the most important opera composer in France in the period before Berlioz, as well as being no mean symphonist. A couple of arias and overtures were in the repertoires of musicians such as McCormack, Tauber and Beecham; two or three operas have made it to disc. (Look out for Ediciones Singulares's recording of *Adrien*, made available as a download last year.) And there are many moments of high drama and acute orchestral wizardry in operas such as *Ariodant* and *Uthal*, which are yet to see the light of day on record.

And what of his symphonies? It was the performance of music such as this in Vienna in the very early 19th century that Beethoven heard, imbuing his own music with that epic post-Revolutionary fervour that is so much a part of his 'middle period'. Is Méhul the 'French Beethoven'? There are certainly moments where you think you might be hearing a draft Beethoven later discarded; and Méhul's music certainly has a similar irresistible

impetus, a recognisable harmonic adventurousness and even, as revealed by repeated listening, a memorability shared by the German composer. What it lacks, perhaps, is that sense of grim inevitability that Beethoven's great works manage to distil, or the willingness to vary a motif so that its repetition doesn't become wearing. Missing, too, is the lyricism that provides such necessary dramatic contrast in the younger man's instrumental works.

The new period band Kapella 19 devote their debut disc to Méhul's Third and Fourth Symphonies, along with the only surviving movement of a fifth (tantalising for its wholesale cribbing of Haydn's *Drumroll* Symphony!). Listeners who know this music from Michel Swierczewski's 1980s Gulbenkian recordings will be surprised by how much more Eric Juteau finds in it, played with a dramatic drive and dynamic explosiveness that eluded the Lisbon musicians. Kapella 19's production team, too, capture a far more vivid sound picture than Nimbus's engineers in a similarly generous acoustic. If these Nuremberg-based players complete the cycle – and perhaps if they are picked up by a major label – this could be the Méhul symphony survey that sets the standard.

**David Thresher**

*Symphonies Nos 3 & 4 – selected comparison:*

*Orch of the Gulbenkian Foundation, Swierczewski*

(7/89) (NIMB) NI5184/5

## Murail

Le partage des eaux<sup>a</sup>. Contes cruels<sup>b</sup>. Sillages<sup>c</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Wiek Hijmans, <sup>b</sup>Seth Josel *elec gtrs*

<sup>a</sup>BBC Symphony Orchestra; <sup>b</sup>Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / Pierre-André Valade  
Aeon (F) AECD1222 (62' • DDD)

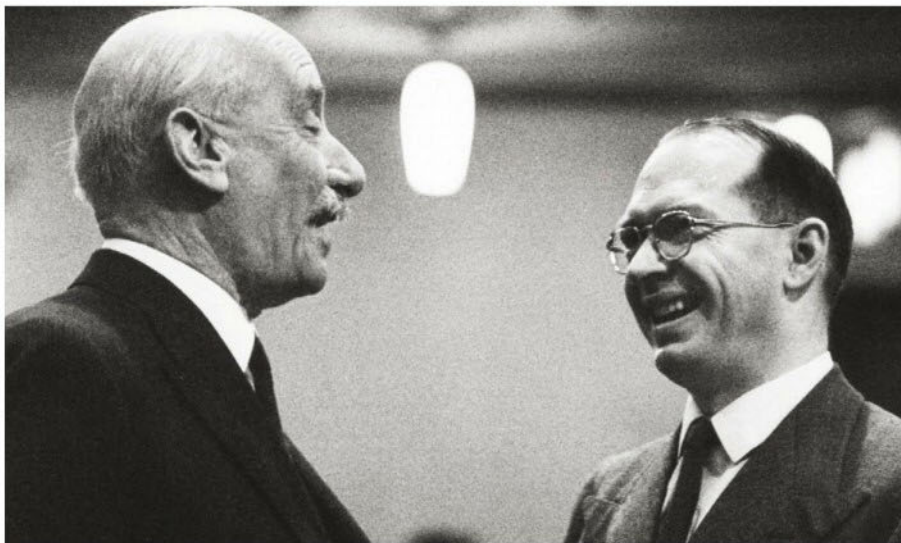


*Le partage des eaux* (1995-96) is one of Tristan Murail's best works, so although this first-rate BBC recording was made back in 2002, its release is very welcome. Murail points out that the title does not refer to 'the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea'. His own associations are less with Debussy – despite the use of swirling surges that distantly echo *La mer* – than with Richard Strauss, and it is no exaggeration to say that this scintillating score does for oceans what Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* does for mountains. It is a finely sustained evocation of a force of nature, and a mightily impressive demonstration of how to use a large orchestra in innovative but never merely eccentric ways. ▶

# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## TREASURES FROM LYRITA

**Andrew Achenbach** welcomes further releases in the British music label's series of off-air recordings in the 'Itter Broadcast Collection'



Lyrita's founder, Richard Itter (right), in conversation with Sir Adrian Boult

**R**ichard Itter, the founder of Lyrita Recorded Edition, died last year but his astounding legacy lives on in the shape of an exciting new initiative. Always a keen collector and taking full advantage of the healthy signal offered by a BBC radio transmitter close to his Buckinghamshire home, Itter built up an extensive collection of private tapes and acetate discs, all made using high-quality equipment and spanning a period of some 44 years. A deal has now been struck with the BBC and the Musicians' Union, so we can look forward to a host of significant performances of home-grown fare bearing the logo of 'Itter Broadcast Collection'.

Rob Cowan has already praised the opening release in last month's *Replay*, which featured an array of British string concertos. But aficionados should waste no time in hearing Mike Clements's judicious tape transfer and restoration of the 1964 Proms premiere of **Arthur Bliss's** powerfully compassionate (and grievously underrated) cantata *The Beatitudes*. The composer obtains hugely spirited results from his two excellent soloists, soprano Heather Harper and tenor Gerald English, the BBC SO and combined choirs, and the performance is altogether more convincing than the Dutton reissue of the acoustically cramped 1962 world premiere in Coventry's Belgrade Theatre (rehearsals for Britten's *War Requiem* in the city's newly consecrated cathedral having taken

**'We can look forward to a host of significant performances of home-grown fare'**

precedence, to Bliss's great chagrin). We also get a thrillingly intense rendering (from April 1957) from contralto Pamela Bowden with the BBC SO under Schwarz of the 1951 dramatic scena *The Enchantress* (originally a vehicle for the inimitable Kathleen Ferrier), while soprano Jennifer Vyvyan shines in a 1958 broadcast devoted to two delicious offerings from the pen of Bliss the *enfant terrible*, namely the 'witchery song' *Madam Noy* (1918) and 'medley of made-up words' *Rout* (1920).

G&S enthusiasts will feel thoroughly at home in **Walter Leigh's** hugely successful 1933 comic opera *Jolly Roger*, a nautical romp that boasts much charming and memorably melodic invention set to a wittily tongue-in-cheek libretto by Victor Clinton-Baddeley. Broadcast (in mono) on December 21, 1972, the present production has a most agreeable whiff of greasepaint about it and can boast a strong cast (including a mellifluous Vernon Midgley in the title-role), as well as sprightly contributions from the Ambrosian Singers and BBC Concert Orchestra under Ashley Lawrence. There's a wee bit of tape damage to contend with at the very start of Act 2 but not enough to take the shine off what is a valuable twofer.

There are two further releases in this latest batch of Lyritas, both of which profitably plunder the BBC's stereo archives. Budapest-born **Mátyás Seiber** (1905-60) was a deeply respected and vigorous presence in British musical life before his premature death aged only 55 in a car accident while on a lecturing tour of South Africa. Two uncommonly absorbing treatments of James Joyce – the large-scale cantata *Ulysses* (1947) and *Three Fragments from 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'* (1957) – attest to Seiber's very real gift for word-painting and searching poetic instinct, and frame the moving *Elegy for solo viola and small orchestra* (1954). Artists include the LSO and LPO under David Atherton and the composer respectively, Melos Ensemble, tenor Alexander Young, viola player Cecil Aronowitz and (as a narrator in the *Three Fragments*) Peter Pears.

One of Seiber's pupils, **Malcolm Lipkin** (b1932), is admirably served by an anthology which gathers together his three symphonies. No 1 (*Sinfonia di Roma*) was written between 1958 and 1965 and wears a nervy, inscrutable demeanour, whereas its single-movement successor (*The Pursuit*, completed 14 years later and essentially a meditation on Andrew Marvell's 'Time's winged chariot hurrying near') is more ready to embrace tonality – a work of integrity, humanity and genuine staying power, in fact. Premiered in 1993, No 3 (*Sun*, inspired by Robert Herrick's 'The Glorious Lamp of Heaven') is cast in a shrewdly integrated, arch-like structure and leaves one in no doubt of Lipkin's durable symphonic instinct. Performances by the BBC Scottish SO under Lionel Friend and BBC PO under Sir Edward Downes and Adrian Leaper are unfailingly sympathetic, and the 1983-93 sound perfectly acceptable too. More soon, please, Lyrita! **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Bliss** *Beatitudes, etc*  
BBC SO / Bliss  
Lyrita (M) REAM1115



**Leigh** *Jolly Roger*  
BBC Concert Orch / Lawrence  
Lyrita (B) (2) REAM2116



**Seiber** *Ulysses, etc*  
Various artists  
Lyrita (F) SRCD348



**Lipkin** *Symphonies Nos 1-3*  
Various artists  
Lyrita (F) SRCD349

The other works included make a less satisfying impression. *Sillages* – ‘furrows, traces, imprints left in water, sand, gravel’ – dates from 1985 and comes across today as a rather dutiful exercise in post-Boulezian atmospherics: you can be absorbed by its refinement and moments of intensity without being swept away by *Le partage des eaux*’s kind of dramatic energy. *Contes cruels* (2007) is even more enigmatic. While nothing if not complex acoustically – it features two electric guitars tuned a quarter-tone apart, with a relatively small orchestra and electronics – it references a ‘cruel tale’ by Villiers de l’Isle-Adam about a percussionist who is driven to distraction by the demands of an unattractively radical composition. The problem is that, for much of its 20-minute length, Murail’s piece seems rather restrained and uneventful, despite the exotic and disruptive possibilities of the sound-sources in use. Perhaps the whole point is to downplay the fireworks that a Ligeti might have brought to the subject. But it reinforces the conclusion that *Le partage des eaux* is the principal and compelling reason for acquiring this disc.

Arnold Whittall

## Nielsen

Flute Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Clarinet Concerto, Op 57<sup>b</sup>.

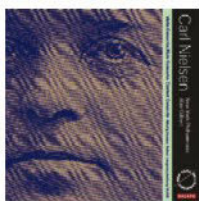
Violin Concerto, Op 33<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Robert Langevin // <sup>b</sup>Anthony McGill cl

<sup>c</sup>Nikolaj Znaider vn New York Philharmonic

Orchestra / Alan Gilbert

Dacapo Ⓢ 6 220556 (77’ • DDD/DSD)



Attention is most surely paid at the start of Nielsen’s Violin Concerto: that

startling Bach-like Praeludium over pedal point is as disarming as it is unexpected. And just as Nielsen so memorably asserted that he sought to creep into the souls of the instruments featured in his three concertos, so Nikolaj Znaider inhabits what follows – an ever-shifting landscape, now Arcadian, now remote, now craggy. The graceful first subject is most elegantly attended, a consolation and a surprise after the rigours of the opening pages. But there is swagger and chivalry yet to come. This first movement is almost a concerto in itself and Znaider makes capital of its variety and unpredictability.

He is searching in the slow movement – a kind of elaborated ‘bridge’ across the two halves of the piece. That it seems to teeter between major and minor tonalities only intensifies the uncertainty of where it

might be taking us. And then there is Znaider, the folksy fiddler, and all he wants to do is make us smile – and dance. A rhythmic bow arm dictates the footwork; the *Maskerade* dances quite literally spring to mind. The recording offers what might be termed a natural concert-hall balance from a decent seat in the front stalls.

The Flute Concerto goes a long way towards redefining the instrument’s true nature and persuading naysayers that it can be more than just a breathy cypher. Nielsen has it butchering up its act no end in the face of marauding timpani and solo trombone. Robert Langevin – principal of the New York Philharmonic – has, of course, the distinct advantage of the telepathy that goes with familiar colleagues to sharpen interaction. For once, though, he is Player King; and from the magical moment where he finds natural repose in one of those gorgeously airy tunes that Nielsen always pulls out in opposition of antagonistic elements to his unlikely betrothal to the aforementioned trombone, the variety of the writing is remarkable. There isn’t an uninventive bar in the piece.

Throughout this disc Alan Gilbert and the NYPO play on the kinship that exists between the symphonies that effectively gave the Flute and Clarinet Concertos breath. The latter is a substantial chip off the block that is the Fifth Symphony – and even has the clarinetist bring his old sparring partner, the side drum, with him. NYPO principal Anthony McGill revels effortlessly in its wild improvisatory nature and those elemental pyrotechnics. It’s dark, furtive and distracted – a kind of nervous breakdown of a piece – and there’s nothing like it in the repertoire.

Ditto all three works. **Edward Seckerson**

## Rachmaninov

Piano Concertos – No 2, Op 18; No 3, Op 30

Stewart Goodyear pf Czech National Symphony

Orchestra / Heiko Mathias Förster

Steinway & Sons Ⓢ STNS30047 (76’ • DDD)



Writing intriguingly in this disc’s accompanying note, Jed Distler tells us of

a phantom presence behind Rachmaninov’s performance of his Third Concerto. For him, Horowitz was ‘the only player in the world of this piece’ and he clearly feared comparison with his friend and compatriot. He also tells us that Horowitz looked askance at the Second Concerto, finding in it fewer opportunities for display. And so from legendary keyboard giants to Stewart

Goodyear in both concertos. His exceptional vigour and impetus in the opening of the Second is a refreshing alternative to other more extreme views (very slow Lang Lang, very fast Stephen Hough). Rising above attention-seeking gestures, his directness and mastery would surely have won the composer’s approval, even prompting a smile to cross that famously dour countenance.

There is more shot-from-guns virtuosity, too, in the Third Concerto, which Goodyear plays without the notorious cuts. He also chooses the more opulent of the two cadenzas, following Van Cliburn’s unforgettable grandeur in his 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition triumph. At the same time there are moments when briskness does duty for a deeper sentiment and engagement. And, although exuberantly and admirably partnered by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra under Heiko Mathias Förster, he is in this sense limited when compared – cruel comparison – to the greatest recordings, to Horowitz, Gilels, Cliburn, Argerich and, of course, the composer himself. **Bryce Morrison**

## Schmierer

Zodiaci Musici

Ensemble Tourbillon / Petr Wagner va da gamba

Accent Ⓢ ACC24294 (72’ • DDD)



Johann Abraham Schmierer (literally ‘scribbler’) was discharged from

Augsburg cathedral choir in 1680, but it was in the same city that *Zodiaci Musici* was published in 1698. Notwithstanding the unwieldy original title, alluding to the signs of the Zodiac, there is no discernible connection between the musical content of the six suites and astrology. The music reveals the typical fascination in late-17th-century Germany for French style, with each suite adopting Lullian character and structure (a French overture followed by seven dances). Schmierer wanted the suites to be multi-purpose, suggesting in his preface that they could be ‘for comedies, dinner music, serenades and other such cheerful gatherings’, and noting that they could be performed by just four solo string instruments and a harpsichord, or alternatively could be expanded by the addition of doubling wind instruments.

Ensemble Tourbillon mix up approaches, performing three suites with only solo strings and continuo but adding flute to No 3 and two oboes and bassoon to some of No 5, and they opt to play No 6

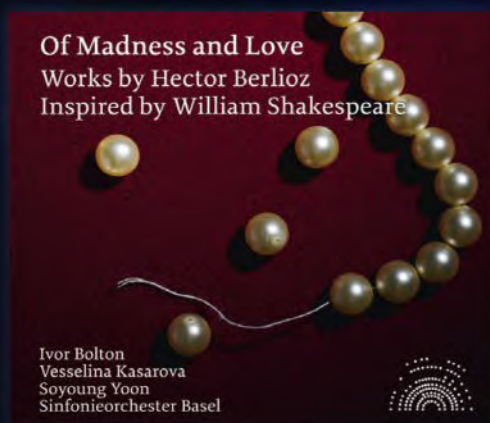


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**CHANDOS**

# August Releases

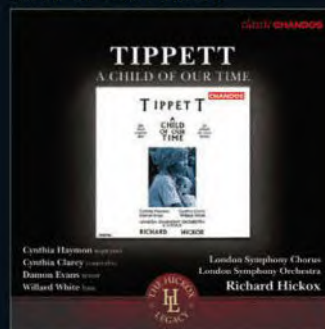
## The Richard Hickox Legacy

His sudden death in November 2008 robbed the world of a most vital, industrious, and energising musician, whose discographical legacy remains a treasure trove of the record catalogue. With the Richard Hickox Legacy we wish to express our gratitude to and appreciation of this great musical artist.

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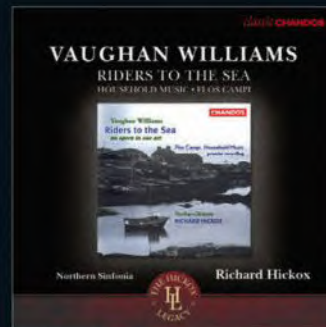


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exclusively on woodwind instruments (a smoothly *cantabile* quartet of two oboes, *taille* and bassoon). Fluent little dances are served effectively by the ensemble's brightly alert and responsive playing: there is plenty of vitality produced by edgy string bowing in quicker dances (such as the *Bourée* in No 2), but in various tripping minuets and rondeaus rhythmical *inégales* are unforced and natural. The delicacy of the *pizzicato* strings and plucked continuo in the *Sarabande* of No 3 is charming, although elsewhere the prominence of two guitars seems less like gilding the lily than suppressing it under a heavy weight of dense strumming. **David Vickers**

## Schoenberg

Violin Concerto, Op 36<sup>a</sup>. Piano Concerto, Op 42<sup>b</sup>

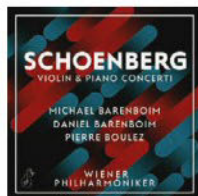
<sup>a</sup>Michael Barenboim *vn* <sup>b</sup>Daniel Barenboim *pf*

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / <sup>b</sup>Pierre Boulez,

<sup>a</sup>Daniel Barenboim

Peral (M) (57' • DDD • peralmusic.com)

Recorded live <sup>b</sup>2005, <sup>a</sup>2012



'Spiritual and not sentimental, intellectual and not emotional' were

Schoenberg's performance values, according to the conductor Hermann Scherchen, and by those lights Michael Barenboim does well with the Violin Concerto. He is fully in command of his formidable solo part, famously written as if for 'a 12-fingered violinist', and his tone is full and even Brahmsian where other soloists such as Rolf Schulte (Naxos, 1/09) and Pierre Amoyal (Apex, 5/86) seem encouraged by the work's apparent spirit of classical detachment to run hot and cold over the appropriate degrees of vibrato and *portamento*.

This is a concert performance, and the younger Barenboim's eloquence in the many recitative-like sections is clearly designed to project to the back of the Musikverein, whereas Hilary Hahn makes good use of a fine DG studio recording to slim back her sound, and never digs in so hard that her tone sours. She and her conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen understand, better than anyone else on record, that this music does not need to be strident or confrontational to make its point. In the finale's *marche militaire* interlude the Barenboims are forthright and foursquare where Hahn bends the rhythms as if playing a Schubert rondo. Michael Barenboim has played the work with several conductors, and a broadcast of his 2013 performance with Michael Gielen shows what a difference it makes to have a conductor with a firm grasp

and a light hand on textures that aspire at once towards Romantic density and Classically quick repartee.

The Piano Concerto presents fewer intrinsic balance problems, and Peral's microphones offer a stalls-ear perspective rather than the ringside seat of Boulez's previous recording with Mitsuko Uchida and the Cleveland Orchestra (Philips/DG, 6/01). Daniel Barenboim's full-blooded approach to the solo part is matched by conducting more prepared to admit ebb and flow than before, though this can lead to passing moments of uncertainty, such as at 2'02" in the first movement. Overall, however, Barenboim and Boulez prove Scherchen's dichotomy to be artificial, more successfully so than any previous version I've heard: there's as much heart as head to the sudden anguish of the *Adagio* and the relief of its resolution in the finale.

**Peter Quantrill**

*Violin Concerto – selected comparison:*

Hahn, Swedish RSO, Salonen (6/08) (DG) 477 7346GH

## Schubert

Complete Symphonies.

Masses – No 5, D678<sup>a</sup>; No 6, D950<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Luba Orgonášová, <sup>b</sup>Dorothea Röschmann *sops*

<sup>b</sup>Bernarda Fink, <sup>a</sup>Birgit Remmert *contrs* <sup>b</sup>Christian

Elsner, <sup>b</sup>Jonas Kaufmann, <sup>a</sup>Kurt Streit *ten*s

<sup>ab</sup>Christian Gerhaher *bass* <sup>ab</sup>Berlin Radio Choir

**Alfonso und Estrella**

Kurt Streit *ten* ..... Alfonso

Dorothea Röschmann *sop* ..... Estrella

Hanno Müller-Brachmann *bass-bar* ..... Adolfo

Jochen Schmeckenbecher *bar* ..... Mauregato

Christian Gerhaher *bass* ..... Froila

**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra /**

**Nikolaus Harnoncourt**

Berliner Philharmoniker (F) (9) (8) + (2)

BPHR150061 (8h 33' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, 2003-06

Blu-ray disc contains audio performances and video interview with Nikolaus Harnoncourt



Between 2003 and 2006, the Berlin Philharmonic

devoted two concerts each season to what was in effect a Harnoncourt Schubert cycle. The series featured the complete symphonies, the last two Masses and a concert performance of Schubert's musically beguiling but theatrically compromised 'Romantic opera in three acts' *Alfonso und Estrella*, of which Harnoncourt has long been a noted exponent.

None of the old record companies would have dreamt of packaging such a mix of works within a single nine-disc set, let alone in a box as beautiful and as impractical as this. (Oblong in shape, it has an irremovable 104-page booklet which can be read only if the entire 21-inch wide, 1½lb structure is fully opened out.)

Unusual juxtapositions can, however, provide unusual insights. The catalysts here are *Alfonso und Estrella* and the Mass in A flat, a work described by Wilfrid Mellers in that fine book *Celestial Music?* (Boydell Press: 2002) as being 'in its very oddities a transcendent masterpiece'. Unlike the better known and ecclesiastically more circumspect E flat Mass, the A flat is a maverick work whose moods can unsettle believers as surely as its modulatory flights can unsettle performers.

Something of a maverick himself, Harnoncourt has the genius to meet the composer on his own chosen ground and deliver the work (such are his skills as a choral conductor) with the surest of touches. He also draws ravishing sounds from the orchestra, a musical necessity if we are to catch the strange transcendent beauty of such things as Schubert's astonishing 29-bar setting of the *Sanctus*.

The performance of the E flat Mass is less interesting and less well recorded. Harnoncourt finds inspiration in the 'Domine Deus' and in Schubert's unforgettable setting of the *Agnus Dei*, but he takes the *sotto voce* opening of the *Credo* at an impossibly quick tempo (it sounds more like a Rossinian conspiracy than a Schubertian meditation) and allows the accompaniment to drown out the lovely cello melody in the 'Et incarnatus'.

Something similar happens in the Trio of the Third Symphony's third movement, where a weak first oboe finds itself competing with an over-prominent violin *staccato* beneath. Perhaps the Berlin recording is partly to blame. In Harnoncourt's Royal Concertgebouw set of the symphonies the passage is perfectly balanced.

That 1992 set remains very fine, more classical in temper, you might say, than these more romantically inflected Berlin performances. The Berliners have the more effulgent sound, which Harnoncourt deploys with skill and imagination, if not always with the kind of on-the-spot incisiveness which Karl Böhm demonstrated in his celebrated Berlin cycle (DG, 5/73). The real problem here is not texture but that old bugbear, Harnoncourt's occasionally maverick way (that phrase again) with rhythm and pulse.



Nikolaus Harnoncourt: making a case for Schubert's neglected opera *Alfonso und Estrella* in a new set of live recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic

Compared with Harnoncourt's 1992 Concertgebouw version, this Berlin account of the 'Great' C major is frankly a mess where the work's larger rhythms are concerned, with the orchestra itself perceptibly ill-at-ease. And though he has abandoned his overly slow tempo for the finale of the Sixth Symphony, the so-called 'Little' C major, this too is all over the place when it comes to paces within individual movements.

Harnoncourt gives terrific performances of the first two symphonies, which emerge as the testosterone-fuelled creations of a young man who knows his Beethoven and who has no fear of dissonance. But even here things can come unstuck. It's Harnoncourt's belief that in a Schubert text '*decrescendo* always means softer, whereas *diminuendo* means softer and *slower* [my italic]'. The effect of this idea is to cause an otherwise gloriously realised account of the Second Symphony's concluding *Presto vivace* to go into dying-swan mode on no fewer than three occasions.

Harnoncourt has always been a superb interpreter of the *Tragic* Fourth Symphony – I know of no finer – while his account of the *Unfinished* Symphony is more predictably and unremittingly tragic. 'A Schubert canvas in the manner of a last work by Rembrandt

or Tintoretto, deep, dark, grim beyond measure' was how I described Karajan's 1975 Berlin recording of the *Unfinished* (EMI, 2/79). Harnoncourt's performance is not dissimilar, some moments of Mahler-like arrhythmia in the opening movement notwithstanding.

*Alfonso und Estrella* deserves a separate release and with it the further discussion and comparisons that that would bring. Suffice it to say that the Berlin cast is more than a match for that on the famous Suitner set (EMI-Electrola, 6/79, now on Brilliant Classics) and that Harnoncourt's direction, aided by the Berliners' own peerless playing, is a joy from start to finish. **Richard Osborne**

*Symphonies – selected comparison:*

RCO, Harnoncourt (12/93<sup>9</sup>) (WACL) 2564 62323-2

## Schubert

Symphony No 9, 'Great', D944

Potsdam Chamber Academy /

Antonello Manacorda

Sony Classical © 88875 06323-2 (55' • DDD)



'Lean of tone and impetuous' is how Richard Wigmore described Antonello

Manacorda's coupling of Schubert's Third and Eighth symphonies with the period instrumentalists of his Potsdam Chamber Academy (Sony, 10/12). It's a phrase I was happy to purloin when describing his next disc in the cycle, a coupling of the Fifth and Sixth symphonies where the Sixth – Schubert's so-called 'Little' C major – responded rather better than the Fifth to his fresh, incisive, at times bullish approach to Schubert's music (Sony, 7/13).

In early chamber-orchestra Schubert cycles under conductors such as Menuhin and Denis Vaughan, the *Great* C major generally ended up a touch underpowered. Abbado changed all that with his 1987 Chamber Orchestra of Europe recording, and Manacorda – a former leader of Abbado's Mahler Chamber Orchestra – brings a similar weight and power to this latest performance. The reading also reflects that Italianate approach to Schubert to which I referred last month when reviewing Abbado's posthumously released 2011 account of the symphony with his Orchestra Mozart.

In Manacorda's performance, the last two movements are superbly done, the first two rather less so. The slow movement never quite sings as it should; it is all a touch dry, the *marche militaire* mood very

much to the fore. (Has the horn's knell before the march's return even been more plainly stated?). This is frustrating given the excellence of the Potsdam ensemble both collectively and in terms of the quality of much of the solo playing.

In the first movement Manacorda races into the *Allegro ma non troppo* like a Ferrari accelerating down a slip road, except that the pace drops back at the second subject and then drops back further for what is an undeniably imaginative treatment of the trombones' quietly awesome entry 65 bars later. It's an unusual way of conducting the exposition and one that's badly upended when the initial surge comes rocketing back with the exposition repeat. In the finale, where Manacorda doesn't observe the exposition repeat, the tempo is much better: a perfectly judged *Allegro vivace*.

Earlier recordings in this series were made in Potsdam. For the *Great C* major, the orchestra has moved to Berlin's Jesus-Christus-Kirche, whose bright, clean acoustic is as effective here as it was back in 1962, when Karajan's Berlin Beethoven cycle won global recognition for the venue with performances that were also 'lean of tone and impetuous'.

**Richard Osborne**

*Selected comparisons:*

COE, Abbado (2/89) (DG) 423 656-2GH

Orchestra Mozart, Abbado (7/15) (DG) 479 4652GH

## Scriabin

Symphonies – No 1, Op 26;

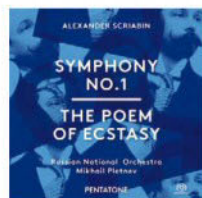
No 4, 'Le poème de l'extase', Op 54<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Svetlana Shilova sop <sup>a</sup>Mikhail Gubsky ten

<sup>a</sup>Chamber Choir of the Moscow Conservatoire;

Russian National Orchestra / Mikhail Pletnev

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 514 (77' • DDD/DSD)



Svetlanov, Muti and Ashkenazy have all, perforce, included the First Symphony in

their complete Scriabin symphony surveys, but otherwise it tends to get fairly short shrift. However, as Mikhail Pletnev shows in this compelling performance with the Russian National Orchestra, it is an important, ambitious, powerful work, not yet characterised by the high-voltage volatility of *The Divine Poem*, *The Poem of Ecstasy* or *Prometheus* but, with the benefit of hindsight, possessing clear indicators of the direction in which Scriabin might be heading. It is a substantial score – six movements lasting almost an hour – but it is cunningly held together by thematic relationships and by a structure which, if pliable, has enough buttresses to support it.

Unlike later works, there is also, for all the sinuous chromaticism, a strong tonal pull: E major for the first movement, E minor for the second, B major for the third, C major for the fourth, E minor again for the fifth and back to E major for the sixth, albeit with an interpolated textbook fugue in C major. The music of the first movement, like so much in this symphony, moves in waves, ebbing, flowing, crashing, subsiding. The same goes for the headier, more perfumed world of *The Poem of Ecstasy*, by turns hovering hypnotically and feverishly animated.

And this is where Pletnev makes his particular mark. He puts in one or two *ritardandos* that are absent from the Belyayev score of the First Symphony, but they seem naturally to emerge from the music's context, as indeed does the entire spectrum of pulse that guides Pletnev's interpretation. He has an innate feel for the symphony's and *The Poem of Ecstasy*'s shape and colour, by no means afraid to let rip when full instrumental forces are in play but also well aware that Scriabin could use his palette of timbres with telling discretion.

The paean to art in the symphony's finale deploys two fine soloists, the soprano Svetlana Shilova and the tenor Mikhail Gubsky, the latter's singing being no less stirring for his shunning of the two alternative top Bs. The Chamber Choir of the Moscow Conservatoire, well drilled and clear in articulation and words, are ideal.

These are performances in which you sense that the RNO and all the artists involved have this music coursing through their very veins, a quality on which Pletnev capitalises to craft readings that thrill and seduce in equal measure. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Sibelius

Overture (1902). Kuolema – Incidental Music, Op 44<sup>a</sup>. Two Songs from Twelfth Night, Op 60<sup>b</sup>.

King Christian II – Incidental Music, Op 27<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Pia Pajala sop <sup>a</sup>Walter Torikka bar

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra / Leif Segerstam

Naxos (N) 8 573299 (71' • DDD • T/t)



This is the first in a new series of six CDs from Naxos devoted to lesser-known Sibelius works and featuring Leif Segerstam at the helm of the Turku Philharmonic. For the 1898 Stockholm production of Adolf Paul's historical drama *King Christian II*, Sibelius originally supplied four numbers (of which both the ravishing Elegie for strings and winsome Musette eventually made their way into the published suite), adding a further

three (Nocturne, Serenade and Ballade) scored for larger forces the following year. Segerstam directs with his customary big heart and acute sensitivity for texture and mood, though some may feel he is inclined to dawdle. The young Finnish baritone Walteri Torikka gives a wonderful account of the haunting 'Fool's Song of the Spider', his eloquent contribution all but matching Sauli Tiilikainen's on Petri Sakari's Iceland PO recording (Chandos, 7/93).

In the six numbers that make up the 1903 score for *Kuolema* (a drama by the composer's brother-in-law Arvid Järnefelt) it's fascinating to encounter the ubiquitous 'Valse triste' and extraordinarily plangent 'Scene with Cranes' (the latter posthumously numbered as Op 44 No 2) in their original context. Soprano Pia Pajala makes a heady thing of Elsa's song 'Eilaa, eilaa', while Torikka's lustrous timbre sent shivers down my spine in 'Paavali's Song'. The disc is filled out with the disappointingly thin Overture in A minor (hastily cobbled together for the March 1902 Helsinki concert that featured the world premiere of the Second Symphony) and *Two Songs from Twelfth Night*, a fetching diptych from 1909 comprising settings for baritone of 'Come away, Death!' and 'Hey, ho, the wind and the rain' (the latter heard in an orchestration by Kim Borg); suffice to say, Torikka is again in splendid voice, and Segerstam offers most attentive support. The engineering is truthful throughout. **Andrew Achenbach**

## R Strauss

*Symphonia domestica*, Op 53.

Die Tageszeiten, Op 76<sup>a</sup>

Berlin Radio <sup>a</sup>Chorus and Symphony Orchestra /

Marek Janowski

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 507

(68' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



It's taken nearly a decade for Pentatone to release a follow-up to its first Strauss disc with Marek Janowski, a coupling of sensible, clear-sighted performances of *Macbeth* and *Eine Alpensinfonie* with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Here Janowski brings similar virtues to the *Symphonia domestica*, which still lags some way behind its Alpine cousin in terms of popularity. Overblown and indiscreet are the standard charges against this musical slice of life (and have been for over a century now), the former levelled against the musical means, the latter against the programme.

Intelligent listeners now know to take Straussian programmes *cum grano salis*,

however, seeking out the philosophical truth found beneath. A performance such as this, meanwhile, presents the piece as anything but excessive. And therein lie both its strength and its weakness. There is remarkable clarity to it, helped by Pentatone's clean if somewhat soft-edged engineering, and Janowski paces everything expertly, never losing sight of the important milestones. The moments of hustle and bustle are wonderfully easy-going, while the Berlin RSO's corporate virtuosity is often breathtaking – I can't remember when I last heard the finale's final couple of minutes, from the outrageous whooping horns to the finish line, rattled through with such apparently nonchalant ease.

The flipside, however, is that there's occasionally something rather too efficient-sounding about it all: listen to the way the *Adagio's* big theme chugs along where it should pulse urgently, for example (tr 3, 2'12"). I miss the characterisation that the RSO's glitzier Berlin neighbour brings to its playing under Karajan and Mehta (or the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Reiner's still unsurpassed 1950s recording). Karajan's performance is arguably rather too boisterous and blustery, but Mehta shows that this work can be reined in without any loss of colour. He also lavishes

an affection on the piece that feels lacking from Janowski, and not just in the distinctly unamorous oboe d'amore solos – the all-important *espressivo* markings that litter the score are too often underplayed. In sum, though packed with many fine things, Janowski's *Domestica* feels a little domesticated.

Where the disc scores highly, though, is in the coupling, generous-spirited and warm recordings of the 1927 *Tageszeiten* for male chorus and orchestra. There's an appealing mellowness to Janowski's account, with fine work from the Berlin Radio Chorus, that is particularly welcome in the gorgeous second and fourth songs.

**Hugo Shirley**

*Symphonia domestica* – selected comparisons:

Chicago SO, Reiner (3/58<sup>th</sup>) (RCA) 88697 68699-2,

88883 79863-2 or 88883 79055-2

BPO, Karajan (4/74<sup>th</sup>) (WACL) 2564 63362-2

BPO, Mehta (7/87<sup>th</sup>) (SONY) MK42322

## Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 5, Op 64.

Fantasy-Overture, 'Romeo and Juliet'

**San Francisco Symphony Orchestra /**

**Michael Tilson Thomas**

SFS Media © SFS0062 (71' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Davies Symphony Hall,

San Francisco, September 3-6 & 18-21, 2014



Captured live at  
Davies Symphony  
Hall, Michael Tilson  
Thomas and the San

Francisco Symphony serve up a Tchaikovsky pairing of conspicuous composure and distinctive character. The Fifth Symphony proves uncommonly thoughtful, urbane and dignified. Not only is the orchestral response scrupulously prepared and free of meretricious flashiness, the performance displays an enviable sweep and long-term control that pay handsome dividends (the finale in particular is fluster-free, refreshingly unvulgar and can boast tremendous cumulative excitement). I was fascinated – and even a little relieved! – to find my own subjective reactions chiming precisely with some comments made by the conductor around the time of this venture: 'My work as a student and young musician with Piatigorsky, Heifetz and Rubinstein imparted to me a sense of elegance about his music. It is this quality that has shaped this performance.' Be aware, then, that the emotional temperature is cooler than some might like. Among recent contenders both Mariss Jansons's classy concert

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relay from Munich and (especially) his protégé Andris Nelsons's superb CBSO account undoubtedly evince the greater charge and interpretative incident, but I should reiterate that Tilson Thomas's impressively lucid and outstandingly eloquent conception works perfectly convincingly on its own terms.

It's a similar tale in *Romeo and Juliet*. For all the gorgeous sheen on show, though, I can't help feeling that Tilson Thomas reins in the ardour a little too much – you'll encounter rather more in the way of cut and thrust, passion and Slavic temperament in distinguished rival accounts from the likes of, say, Abbado (Boston SO), Rostropovich (LPO – EMI/Warner, 10/78, 9/96) and Nelsons; nor, for that matter, am I entirely comfortable about those extra cymbal clashes from fig 5 onwards (at 15'55" and again, eight bars later, at 16'09"). Both sound and balance throughout are beyond reproach.

**Andrew Achenbach**

*Symphony No 5 – selected comparisons:*

Bavarian RSO, Jansons (1/11) (BRKL) 900105

CBSO, Nelsons (10/09) (ORFE) C780 091A

*Romeo and Juliet – selected comparisons:*

Boston SO, Abbado (4/72\*) (ELOQ) 457 309-2

CBSO, Nelsons (5/11) (ORFE) C832 101A

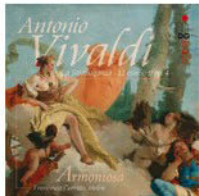
## Vivaldi

La stravaganza, Op 4

Armoniosa / Francesco Cerrato *vn*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © ②

MDG901 1885-6 (102' • DDD/DSD)



The exquisite chaconne from the final concerto of Vivaldi's *La stravaganza*

may be worth the entry price alone. But this second set of 12 concertos for violin and strings with continuo – published, like the hugely influential 1711 set *L'estro armonico*, by Estienne Roger of Amsterdam – positively o'er brims with further musical delights. So it's hard to believe it was less well received than its predecessor, especially when performed by such persuasive advocates of Vivaldi's bravura originality as Italian period instrument band Armoniosa and violinist/director Francesco Cerrato.

Cerrato and Armoniosa enter, well, if not a crowded field then one distinguished more by quality than quantity, and among my enduring favourites are the suavely elegant Monica Huggett with the Academy of Ancient Music under Hogwood, the characterful Rachel Podger with Arte dei Suonatori and the ardently stylish Fabio Biondi with Europa Galante (Virgin, 7/11 – though the latter's is not a complete

recording). But the new kids on the block – Cerrato founded Armoniosa only in 2012 – have convincingly staked their claim with this debut recording for MDG. Using both harpsichord and organ continuo for colouristic effects throughout, the general approach is however immediately apparent with the opening B flat major concerto. The strongly accented down-bows of the *Allegro* anchor a gentler flow enlivened by strong contrasts between solo and *concertante* episodes, presaging Cerrato's deliciously ornamented line in the *Adagio* before he cuts loose in the final stages of the closing *Allegro* with some typically Vivaldian high-register passagework.

And so it goes on. Armoniosa render the following dramatic E minor concerto (No 2) with the requisite chiaroscuro, connecting with the *sfumato* of the atmospheric slow movement of the A minor concerto (No 4), marked *Grave e sempre piano*. The relaxed expansiveness of the *Largo* of No 7 in C – the only four-movement concerto – is masterly and recalls La Serenissima's approach (Avie, A/09). The brisk antiphonal exchanges between the two solo violins in the D major No 11's *Allegro* create an electricity that dissipates in the following *Largo*, which features a particularly rich cello accompaniment.

An impressive debut indeed. **William Yeoman**

*Selected comparisons:*

AAM, Huggett (3/87\*) (DECC) 478 3958DM2

Arte dei Suonatori, Podger

(5/03) (CHNN) CCSSA19503 or CCS19598

## Widor

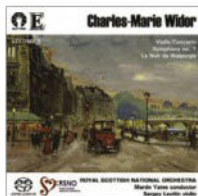
'Volume 3'

Violin Concerto (ed Yates)<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 1, Op 16. La nuit de Walpurgis, Op 60

<sup>a</sup>Sergey Levitin *vn*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7315 (78' • DDD)



Widor's ubiquitous Toccata from Symphony No 5, in spite of being

his defining work, is by no means representative of his output, a point illustrated on this disc of world premiere recordings (and on the two earlier volumes – 1/12, 12/13) from Dutton and the indefatigable Martin Yates.

Whatever you think of the material, one has to acknowledge Widor the master orchestrator, Dutton's sumptuously engineered sound and the full-bodied, punchy playing of the RSNO, who give every impression of thoroughly enjoying themselves, not least in the three-

movement symphonic poem *La nuit de Walpurgis*. Widor wrote this in 1887 for orchestra and chorus. The choral part is not included here (we are not told why) yet it is, as the booklet puts it, 'a sparkling *tour de force* of orchestral writing' and a striking example of the *nouvelle vague* of serious French symphonic aspirations.

That Widor wrote a Violin Concerto will come as a surprise to many. Martin Yates relates in the booklet how he unearthed it, although whether it is the concerto premiered in 1877, a revised version from 1894 or a conflation of the two remains a puzzle. What we have in Yates's edition is a three-movements-in-one work of great charm and melodic appeal, with all the characteristic display and lyrical writing one expects from a late-19th-century concerto though not, despite Sergey Levitin's honey-toned advocacy, on a par with the almost exactly contemporaneous examples by Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Goldmark, Bruch (No 2) and Lalo (*Symphonie espagnole*).

The disc ends with the earliest work here in order of composition. Symphony No 1 was written in 1870 at a time when French composers rarely ventured into the genre. Widor in later life denounced it as being 'completely unskilled and naive from the orchestral point of view'. Too harsh, I think, and Yates inspires a performance of such conviction from his players it is as if he wishes to prove the composer wrong.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## 'Bach to Moog'

'A Realisation for Electronics and Orchestra' Brandenburg Concerto No 4, BWV1049. Cantatas: No 147 – Jesus bliebet meine Freude; No 156 – Sinfonia. Goldberg Canons, BWV1087. Goldberg Variations, BWV988 – Aria. Orchestral Suite No 3, BWV1068 – Air. Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006 – Prelude. Toccata and Fugue, BWV565. Violin Sonata No 4, BWV1017 – Siciliano (all arr Leon)

Jennifer Pike *vn*

Sinfonietta Cracovia / Craig Leon *Moog synths*

Sony Classical © 88875 05261-2 (53' • DDD)



Bach, performed on a modern copy of a period instrument: nothing new there.

Until you discover the instrument in question is a recreation of the 1973 Moog System 55 modular synthesiser, lovingly handcrafted using, according to Moog's website, all of the original documentation and circuit board and art files.

In 1968 Moog exponent Wendy (then Walter) Carlos unleashed 'Switched-On Bach' on an unsuspecting public (4/69). In



Italian period-instrument 'new kids on the block' Armoniosa: staking their claim in Vivaldi on their debut recording for MDG

doing so, she altered the course of musical history – pop and classical – forever. 'Bach to Moog' is part celebration of Carlos's (in the eyes of some, dubious) achievement, part commemoration to mark 50 years since Robert Moog first introduced his large-format analogue modular synthesisers and 10 years since his death. But – and unexpectedly for this initially sceptical reviewer – it's primarily an utterly exhilarating listening experience which will captivate old fans and newbies alike.

There's a lot happening here which could quickly turn nasty: multiple synthesisers, multitracking, processed strings, synthesised brass and timpani, and some risky duetting between violinist Jennifer Pike and 'Bach to Moog' mastermind Craig Leon, record producer and arranger to the stars as well as an extraordinary composer and keyboardist in his own right. However, it never does, and what's most striking is the exceptional warmth, depth and richness Leon produces from his analogue synthesisers, as well as his exuberant playing and imaginative arrangements. Ably supported by Sinfonietta Cracovia and with Pike so obviously getting the project, Leon manages to leave you with the sense you're hearing this music for the first time and having an absolute ball into the bargain. **William Yeoman**

## 'New Seasons'

**Glass Violin Concerto No 2, 'The American Four Seasons' Kancheli Ex contrario Pärt Estonian Lullaby<sup>a</sup> Umebayashi In the Mood for Love – Yumeji's Theme**

**Kremerata Baltica / Gidon Kremer** *vn*

<sup>a</sup>**'Girls' Choir of the Vilnius Choir-Singing**

**School 'Liepaitės'**

DG © 479 4817GH (78' • DDD)



Gidon Kremer is one of those rare musicians capable of illuminating a new work in such a way as to reveal its true greatness. Giya Kancheli's *Ex contrario* is not exactly 'new' (it dates back to 2006) but Kremer and Kremerata Baltica's excellent performance does much to suggest that Kancheli's epic paean to pathos must rank as one of his greatest compositions. The title is appropriate – *Ex contrario* is contrary to itself and pretty much everything else. It steadfastly defies categorisation, pitting moments of tender lyricism against strident dissonances in a bittersweet struggle that never seems to achieve full closure.

Such diurnal mood swings reflect the ever-changing nature of the seasons, which

in turn is meant to connect the four works included on this disc, but only Glass's Second Violin Concerto directly refers to his theme. Kremer's interpretation shines new light on Glass's now-familiar patterns and stock formulas too. He approaches the opening prologue and subsequent solo interludes that separate the concerto's four movements with perhaps less full-blooded intensity than Tim Fain (*Orange Mountain*, 7/15). Kremer's playing is quite reserved and detached during these unaccompanied vignettes. This allows him to inject more drive and passion into the orchestral movements – the first and third played with dark drama, the elegiac third fragile and beautiful, while the final movement is dispatched with almost devilish insouciance, Kremerata Baltica just about holding on to the violinist's coat-tails.

Arvo Pärt's *Estonian Lullaby*, sung with wonderful restraint by the Girls' Choir of the Vilnius Choir-Singing School, and Japanese film composer Shigeru Umebayashi's pleasant 'Yumeji's Theme' pass almost unnoticed next to Glass's large-scale concerto and Kancheli's postmodern 'sinfonia concertante'. Kremer's performances, as ever, bring the music to full bloom: truly a 'musician for all seasons'. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

# Ravel's *Shéhérazade*

**Susan Graham** discusses the song-cycle's imagery and exoticism with **Joshua Kosman**

With its dog-eared page corners and its spine bound and rebound with library tape, Susan Graham's score of Ravel's *Shéhérazade* is a tattered palimpsest that holds a record of her history with this song-cycle. Inside the back cover the American mezzo keeps a neatly pencilled roster of all the conductors with whom she's performed it – more than a dozen names since she first undertook the work with Donald Runnicles and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in 2003. And the pages themselves bristle with the instructions and preferences of the various maestros, each one of them attributed with a pair of initials. One of the most recent conductors is Seiji Ozawa, with whom she has also recorded the work; it's due for release on Decca on August 7.

'I keep everyone's markings,' Graham says as we bend over the score together at the San Francisco Opera, where she is in the midst of a triumphant run as Didon in Berlioz's *Les troyens*. 'In the fifth measure here, PB – that's Boulez – was in six, and Tortelier was in three. You have to know these things!' When we get to 'Comme un immense oiseau,' one maestro wants the elision – 'immen-soiseau' – but Plasson wants 'immense-oiseau.'

There are indications throughout the score from other sources as well. Some come from Graham's French coach, Denise Massé, others from Pierre Bernac's classic text *The Interpretation of French Song*. And some notations are purely functional – the initials BB are simply Graham's reminder to herself to take a big breath.

*Shéhérazade*, composed in 1903 to poems by Léon Leclère writing under the extravagantly Wagnerian pseudonym Tristan Klingsor, is a voluptuous, elusive score, full of mysteries and interpretative pitfalls for both performer and listener. Its three songs conjure up a world of exoticism and erotic languor, the very qualities that would later fall under the complex rubric of Orientalism. Yet the piece is at least as much about the dreamer as the dream, an evocation of the act of imagining a far-off land of enchantment.

A journey through *Shéhérazade* alongside Graham brings a blend of practical wisdom and impressionistic insight. Following the lead of whichever maestro is at the helm of a particular performance frees her to immerse herself in the poetic imagery and musical workings of the score.

'Unless it's a phrase I have strong feelings about, I generally go along with what the conductor wants. Especially with a piece like this, where I don't have to do any strange



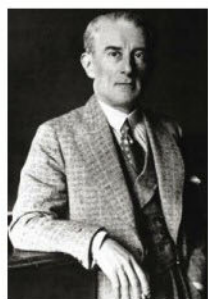
'A great story to tell': Susan Graham in *Shéhérazade*, conducted by Seiji Ozawa

stage contortions. All I have to do is follow the stick and tell my story. And this is such a great story to tell, because it has so many colours and textures and sensualities. It's rich in text painting and tastes and flavours and smells, images and drama, killing and brutality and gruesomeness. There are so many opportunities for me.'

The sensuality and the gruesomeness come face-to-face with particular vividness near the end of the first song, 'Asie', just before rehearsal number 13 in the Durand edition. The text mentions a landscape painting of someone standing in the middle of an orchard, then suddenly shifts to a tableau of vengeful assassins.

'Bernac says that line about the painting is so mysterious that you just have to play the strangeness of it,' says Graham. 'It's cast in watercolours, and then – CLANG! – all hell breaks loose in the very next bar, and my heart starts beating really hard. It gets so brutal with this sharp blade that's going to cut the throat of an intoxicant, and they're cutting off heads right and left.'

'When I started singing this piece we weren't witnessing things like this, but now, when I sing this phrase, it depends a lot on what's been in the news that week. I have sung this



## The historical view

*Tristan Klingsor (real name Léon Leclère), some time after the 1904 premiere*

'Ravel's love of difficulty led him to choose, in addition to "L'Indifférent" and "La flûte enchantée", [a poem] which, by reason of its length and narrative form, seemed the least suited to his purpose: "Asie".'

*Erik Satie, Le coq, May 1920 (in a public declaration of the negative stance he took towards his former benefactor)*

'M Ravel refuses the Légion d'honneur, but all his music accepts it.' (Satie also said to Jean-Aubry, in 1919, that he found Ravel's aesthetic 'deplorable and outmoded'.)

*Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, expressing his opinion on Ravel (quoted in The Oxford History of Western Music, 2004)*

'[Regarding] using dissonance with all the rights of consonances, it's not my cup of tea; I should hurry right home lest I get used to it and, God forbid, begin to like it.'

piece right after one of those terrible Isis executions, and to sing those words in a setting by Ravel feels very weird. It seems like some kind of brutal fantasy, and then it's not.'

The climax of the first song, and indeed of the cycle as a whole, comes just a few pages later, when the singer concludes her imagined visions of the East, and the full orchestra, finally let off the tether by Ravel, weighs in with a *fortissimo* flood of sound. In a well-shaped performance, this feels like the moment that the orchestra has been waiting for all along.

'If things are going well, and you get to this moment, it's orgasmic. It's like a great wave crashing over you, and to be standing in the spot that I get to stand in and feel it just knock me over from behind – it's my favourite moment in the entire night.'

Graham says that she keeps a specific persona in mind for each song of *Shéhérazade*, beginning with a world traveller for 'Asie'. For the second song, 'La flûte enchantée', she pictures herself as Rosina in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* – a young woman imprisoned by an old man, while her lover, represented by the flute, serenades her from outside the window.

Asked about the interaction between singer and flautist in this texturally spare song, Graham says that the two artists are mostly free to go their own way; aside from the two measures at rehearsal number four, there's not much coordination required between the two. But rhythmic freedom is a key issue in the song – especially right before rehearsal number two, where Ravel marks 'ad lib' on a solo figure for the flute that leads directly into a new tempo.

'You can tell a lot about a flautist by how much they ad lib,' Graham says, 'because most of them don't want to at all. They play it exactly as it's printed. But actually you can go 'deedly-deedly-deedly' and stay there forever if you want. I think orchestral players are not used to having the spotlight, and they're not used to having the conductor follow them. So they're always thinking, "When is he going to give me the upbeat to bring the orchestra in", rather than telling the conductor, "I'm going up now and you catch me".'

In the brief final song, 'L'Indifférent', the narrator catches sight of a beautiful youth ambling past her (or perhaps his?) door, but – alas! – not coming in. Graham says she knows that youth intimately.

'I had a boyfriend once who could be this person. He was younger than I was, and he was beautiful, just beautiful. He came into my life, and he went out of my life. It was *senza rancore*, no bad feelings, but I just watched him saunter away and it was lovely. And that to me is what this song is.'

The proportions of *Shéhérazade* are strange – a big song followed by two much shorter ones – and the ending stranger still, with a dominant seventh trailing off into silence. Audiences are often unsure about whether the piece is actually over, Graham says.

'But I'm working on the Mallarmé songs now, and they're even weirder. They're just whispers for the most part; the strings go 'shh-shh-shh', and then I sing. Softly. But you know, that was Ravel. He was Monet, he just wanted to take little brushes and make little images of things that, if you stand back far enough, you get it. But if you stand too close and try to make out what it is, it's just little brushes of colour and they don't come together until much later.'

▶ Susan Graham's recording of *Shéhérazade* with the Saito Kinen Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa will be reviewed in the next issue of Gramophone

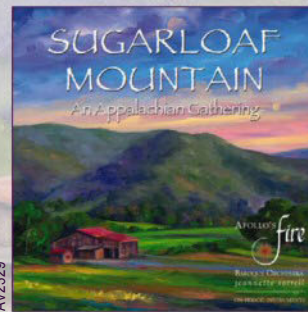
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# Chamber



**Jeremy Dibble on a new Finzi disc including a premiere recording:**  
*'Given the high-quality performances on this CD, I hope the Cologne soloists will go on to do other British repertoire'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



**Richard Whitehouse salutes a disc of John McLeod on Delphian:**  
*'Combative and assured playing by the Red Note Ensemble in a worthwhile 80th-birthday tribute'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**

## Adès • Debussy • Ravel

'Sound Escapes'

**Adès** Arcadiana **Debussy** String Quartet, Op 10

**Ravel** String Quartet

**Signum Quartet**

Capriccio © C5239 (69' • DDD)



The Signum Quartet's enterprising schedule for Capriccio continues with this

pairing of the Debussy and Ravel quartets, along with *Arcadiana* by Thomas Adès. This fourth and latest recording confirms the latter work's significance in the quartet repertoire of the past quarter-century; and if the Signum are more robust in projecting its subtly contrasting moods than the Calder Quartet on an all-Adès disc (Signum Classics; see the quartet round-up in last month's issue), this does not preclude an engaging continuity from emerging over the course of seven movements in which irony and pathos are held deftly in accord through to those teasingly insubstantial closing pages.

It is an insubstantiality that brings out a similar elusiveness in the French quartets on either side. Admittedly the Debussy slightly loses focus after a forthright opening movement, its *scherzo* just a little hesitant and the *Andantino* muted in its eloquence, though the finale drives home the piece's cyclical evolution with no mean decisiveness. The Ravel, however, has a greater overall consistency – the initial *Allegro* shot through with wistful elegance and the *scherzo* yielding a pert nonchalance, before the slow movement brings an inward repose which more than usually carries over into the finale with its cumulative surge towards a hard-won resolve.

Clearly those primarily interested in the Adès should in the first instance acquire the Signum Classics disc, but this release is arguably the most provocative coupling yet for these warhorses of the quartet

repertoire. Clear and immediate recording, along with detailed booklet-notes, round out the attractions of a most worthwhile collection.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Albinoni • Vivaldi

'La Serenissima – Venetian Church Sonatas'

**Albinoni** Sonate a tre, Op 1 – Nos 1-6

**Vivaldi** Trio Sonata, RV81. Oboe Sonata, RV53

**Camerata degli Amici / Jaime González ob**

Genuin © GEN15332 (55' • DDD)



The misnomer *sonata da chiesa* for the Corellian sequence of slow-fast-slow-fast

movements has somehow stuck for good, even if such sonatas did not have much direct connection to church services. This collection of 'Venetian Church Sonatas' presents the first half of Albinoni's Op 1 Trio Sonatas, published in 1694 and dedicated to the Venetian cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (Corelli's employer and also patron of Handel, Alessandro Scarlatti and Vivaldi).

The two upper parts, originally for violins, are played by Jaime González and Pietro Corna on modern oboes, and they are supported by a large continuo group of keyboard (organ and harpsichord), theorbo (occasionally using guitar), cello and bassoon. Those wanting to hear an authentically scored interpretation by two Baroque violins accompanied simply by harpsichord and cello can seek out a 2001 recording by Parnassi Musici, but Camerata degli Amici's oboe-fuelled interpretations offer plenty of lyrical musicality, not least from the prominent bassoon's jocular bass-lines and the discreet continuo contributions of lutenist Thomas C Boysen and keyboardist Torsten Johann (both alumni of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra).

The programme is completed by two Vivaldi sonatas not printed during his

lifetime: a trio sonata for two oboes and continuo (RV81) survives in Lund (Sweden), and the oboe sonata in C minor (RV53) is preserved in Dresden, which makes it seem likely that it could have been written for the Saxon court's virtuoso oboist Johann Christian Richter (who visited Venice with the Dresden court orchestra); the *Andante* is played exquisitely by the partnership of González and Boysen.

**David Vickers**

*Albinoni – selected comparison:*

*Parnassi Musici (CPO) CPO999 770-2*

## Bottesini

**Duetto**<sup>a</sup>. Capriccio, Op 19<sup>b</sup>.

**Gran Quintetto**, Op 99<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>**Alessandro Dorella** cl/<sup>ab</sup>**Davide Botto**,

<sup>b</sup>**Davide Ghio** dbss<sup>ab</sup>**Elda Laro** pf

'String Quintet of the Teatro Regio, Turin

Chandos © CHAN10867 (52' • DDD)



Your reviewer first discovered the undemanding delights of Bottesini on an

early-ish CD (1986) originally on ASV with the young Andrew Litton and the ECO accompanying Emma Johnson and Thomas Martin in the *Duetto* for clarinet and double bass. This newcomer doesn't compare. What is too obviously a piano reduction of the orchestral score is no substitute for the ECO, and the two Italians are leaden-footed compared with the airy playfulness of Martin and Johnson (the ASV performance is timed at 8'15", the Chandos at 9'55").

This is followed by the premiere recording of Bottesini's Capriccio for two double basses and piano, composed sometime between 1835 and 1839, the period when all his other works for two double basses were written. Curiously it shares the same coda as the *Duetto* (above). The technical demands on the players are considerable; the musical rewards for the listener less so.



Christian and Tanja Tetzlaff, who are joined by pianist Lars Vogt in a compelling new set of the Brahms piano trios on Ondine

The *Gran Quintetto* in C minor is another matter. Written in 1858, it is dedicated to Saverio Mercadante, with whose works it shares the same strong melodic appeal. The string-writing demonstrates what a richly gifted craftsman was Bottesini, who gives a prominent role to the violin and relegates the double bass to its customary role of providing harmonic and rhythmic support. Recorded at a session two months later than the other works here, it is not only better recorded but better performed. We should hear the *Quintetto* more often.

The booklet essay, despite its stiffly rendered English translation, is informative; six writers and translators are credited. Its other unusual features include 'a note from Thomas Martin' (to what end I'm unsure), 'a note from the Mayor of the City of Crema' (who sponsored the recording), and remarkably fulsome encomiums from Alessandro Dorella and Davide Botto in praise of the makers of the instruments they use on the recording. I don't think Chandos had very much to do with the gestation of this disc.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

*Duetto – selected comparison:*

*Johnson, Martin, ECO, Litton (11/86<sup>8</sup>) (NAXO) 8 570397*

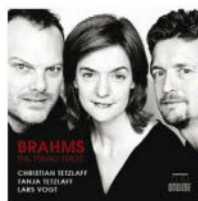
## Brahms

Piano Trios – No 1, Op 8 (revised version);

No 2, Op 87; No 3, Op 101

**Christian Tetzlaff** *vn* **Tanja Tetzlaff** *vc* **Lars Vogt** *pf*

Ondine ® ② ODE1271-2D (82' • DDD)



Brahms's three piano trios make an obvious programme for disc, even if, played one after the other, there's just slightly too much music to fit on a single CD. No matter, however, when enterprising companies such as Ondine offer the two discs for the price of one; but wouldn't it have been better to have an extra piece and another half-hour or so of the Tetzlaffs' and Vogt's marvellous musicianship?

Never mind, as these are truly admirable performances. Disc 1 contains the Second and Third Trios, while the First sits alone on disc 2. So you can play them in chronological order simply enough, although it's instructive to be introduced to these performances via the more ebullient sound world of the Second, with the First, the most popular of the three, to close the

programme. These players have been performing together for a long time – the string players, naturally, since childhood – and much in evidence is that telepathy that passes between musicians comfortable in each other's company. Think back, for example, to Christian Tetzlaff's Schumann violin sonatas with Vogt (1/14) and the fervour of concentration and musical consideration that was so clearly evident in those performances.

For comparison I went back to another siblings-plus-pianist ensemble – the Capuçons with Nicholas Angelich. Whereas they imbue this music with a certain Gallic *douceur*, albeit strengthened by the backbone of Angelich's pianism, the Tetzlaffs and Vogt bring a Teutonic terseness to it, screwing up the tension that is so much part of Brahms's music and making each span into a wonderfully cathartic experience. Christian Tetzlaff perhaps doesn't play with the creamy richness of Renaud Capuçon but the blend between this most thoughtful of musicians and his sister is as natural and complete as one might expect. And Vogt's propulsive pianism is every bit the equal of his American counterpart's – especially in the strenuous writing of the First and Third

Trios – and deliciously light-fingered in moments such as the eerie *Hexen-Scherzo* of the Second Trio. If ultimately it comes down to the invidious choice between Tetzlaffs and Capuçons, I'm stumped. Buy both.

**David Threasher**

*Selected comparison:*

R & G Capuçon, *Angelich* (VIRG) 545653-2

## Finzi

**Finzi** Five Bagatelles. Elegy. Romance.

Introit. Interlude. Prelude and Fugue

**Vaughan Williams/Ferguson/A Bush/**

**Rawsthorne/Lutyens/Maconchy/**

**Finzi/G Williams/Jacob** Diabelleries

**Cologne Chamber Soloists**

Dabringhaus und Grimm (P) MDG903 1894-6 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Although Finzi did not compose much chamber music, his innately contrapuntal

style, informed by enduring fascination for the music of Bach, lends itself well to the idiom – especially when as stunningly performed as here by the Kölner Kammersolisten (and a singular instance of a continental recording of Finzi to boot). This is especially true of the two original chamber works from the 1930s, the rarely heard Interlude for oboe and string quartet, and Prelude and Fugue for string trio dedicated to that luminary of counterpoint and pedagogy, RO Morris. The Interlude is a bittersweet essay, encapsulating most of those haunting lyrical attributes of Finzi's style (and beautifully played by Tom Owen), while the Prelude and Fugue is more astringent in its leaner texture and plaintive mood (surely the Prelude makes allusion to Warlock's *The Curlew*?).

The Five Bagatelles for clarinet and solo strings lend themselves well to Christian Alexander's instrumentation and were, as he aptly argues, surely intended for such an ensemble (Lawrence Ashmore's arrangement for string orchestra is similarly successful – Naxos, 12/98), and the Romance is also convincing as a chamber piece (though I own to preferring its string-orchestra garb). This 'chamber' element is also betrayed in the two affecting violin miniatures, the Elegy and Introit (intended originally for larger works), both of which fluctuate between a post-Romantic yearning and a neo-Baroque style (which Finzi surely derived from his admiration for Parry).

The premiere recording of the little-known *Diabelleries*, a set of variations for

larger chamber ensemble on Alfred Scott-Gatty's theme, 'Oh! Where's my little basket gone?', is most welcome and one of those fascinating phenomena where a group of contemporary composers has contributed to a single or multi-movement work. A present for Anne Macnaghten and her New Music Group (who performed it for the first time in May 1955), and a suggestion initiated by Vaughan Williams, it features nine variations by different British composers. Finzi's 'Forlana', written while he was ensconced in the composition of his Cello Concerto, is a pastoral miniature, full of his characteristic dissonances and appoggiaturas, but it contrasts markedly with the quirky waltz of Howard Ferguson, a delightful *scherzo* by Alan Bush, a typically acerbic neo-classical offering from Alan Rawsthorne and Elizabeth Lutyens's 'Canonic Interlude' which is a lean, contrapuntal and more Webernesque essay. Machonchy's variation manages to give the theme a passionate, not to say ironic apparel, while that of Grace Williams, the third female composer to feature in the collection, has a more mysterious, lush post-romantic air. Gordon Jacob's finale, as one might expect, is a helter-skelter of brilliant instrumental effects replete with a hilarious quote from the coda of Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture.

Given the high-quality performances on this CD, I hope the Cologne soloists will go on to do other British repertoire with the same aplomb as is shown here.

**Jeremy Dibble**

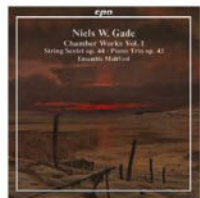
## Gade

**'Chamber Works, Vol 1'**

String Sextet, Op 44 (plus early version of 1st movt). Piano Trio, Op 42

**Ensemble MidtVest**

CPO (P) CPO777 164-2 (62' • DDD)



Just over two decades ago, Niels W Gade's 1864

Sextet was hailed in these pages as his 'finest extended chamber work'. It's a large-scale, well-organised piece with a Brahmsian sense of purpose and forward motion, if still possessing the lighter textures, and some of the early Romantic fantasy, of Mendelssohn and Schumann, Gade's still inevitable poles of comparison. It's well paced and balanced here by Ensemble MidtVest at the start of a CPO project to take in all of Gade's many string-dominated chamber works. Rival performances from the Berlin

Philharmonic String Octet (rather grand-sounding and stately) and the Johannes Ensemble are lying low at the moment, so proceed with confidence to this new reading, which has more Scandinavian air about it. But why did Gade completely rewrite the work's first movement? You can dip into this mystery about his work now for yourself by listening to the (wholly) convincing and slightly shorter original. Was he seeking a closer (darker) match to what followed?

The F major Piano Trio (1863) – one of three Gade works for this instrumental line-up – has a greater lightness and sense of exhibition, especially in the piano part. Some may term this salon-ish but, to my ears, it reveals a regional kinship with Grieg. Gade is especially successful at blurring the dividing lines of conventional sonata-form structures (first and last movements) into a more continuous and rhapsodic-sounding whole. The Trio gets a well worked-in performance, especially from pianist Martin Qvist Hansen, and is helpfully more warmly and closely recorded than are an older rival, Tre Musici (Classico).

Gade is still better known here as a name on old posters who had something to do with Mendelssohn. These two performances can make a potent introduction to an interesting voice perched intriguingly on the borders of German Romanticism, Brahmsian neo-classicism and a growing Scandinavian nationalist school.

**Mike Ashman**

## Liszt

**Grand duo concertant sur la Romance**

de M Lafont 'Le marin', S128. Die Zelle

in Nonnenwerth, S382*bis*. Epithalam zu

Eduard Reményi's Vermählungsfeier, S129.

Hungarian Rhapsody No 12, S379a. Elegy

No 2 S131*bis*. Romance oubliée, S132.

La lugubre gondola, S134*bis*

**Ulf Wallin** *vn* **Roland Pöntinen** *pf*

BIS (P) BIS2085 (60' • DDD/DSD)



This is the second disc of Liszt's violin-and-piano works to come my way within a few months. In the May issue I welcomed the selection played by Voytek Proniewicz and Wojciech Waleczek, lively, polished performances and well recorded. Three of their pieces crop up again on Wallin and Pöntinen's programme: the *Grand Duo concertant*, Second Elegy and *Epithalam*. There is little to choose between the two ►

# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## LESSER-KNOWN CHAMBER MUSIC

**Harriet Smith** listens to a collection of discs that rediscover some forgotten string quartets and quintets from the 18th and 19th centuries



The Sheridan Ensemble offer revelatory Czerny on Capriccio

CPO is a great champion of lesser-known chamber music, intrepidly introducing us to the Raffs and Grafs of this world. And there are certainly treasures to be found, reminding us how limited our concert-going diet can be.

The earliest music here is by **Christian Ernst Graf**, born nine years before Joseph Haydn and part of a hugely musical dynasty. Though born in Germany, he changed his surname to Graaf when he became Kapellmeister to William V, Prince of Orange. His quartets find the genre in a state of transition, with three of them underpinned by a harpsichord continuo, while in the remaining two the cello takes an obligato role. The period-instrument *Via Nova* Quartet are best in the faster movements – the finale of Op 17 No 1, for instance – but the violins can tend towards the sour at times, not least in the arching phrases of Op 17 No 4's opening movement. The harpsichord-playing, too, is a touch dogged.

Period instruments again feature in **Boccherini's** Op 15 set, played by the Alea Ensemble. Here we have a very close recording, capturing every breath and bow sound. There's plenty of fervour on display but the sheer range of these works doesn't necessarily come across: the serene *Andantino* of the E major Quartet, for instance, doesn't occupy a sufficiently different world from

the *Adagio* of No 5. And the various *prestissimo* movements would have benefited from more light and shade.

From quartets to quintets. **Michael Haydn's** biggest misfortune was being the younger brother of Joseph, for he was a formidably gifted composer in his own right (as Joseph himself acknowledged). His complete string quintets, variously described by the composer as *Nottornos* and *Divertimentos*, depending on the occasion for which they were intended, are a veritable cornucopia. Among the many highlights are the variation-form fourth movement of the B flat major Quintet, which is full of innovative touches, the G major Quintet's wonderfully touching *Adagio affettuoso* and some madcap finales (the G major again, and that of the F major). Unfortunately these performances are hampered by a very cavernous acoustic (Salzburg's Kuenburg Palace). And there's a suspicion that perhaps not all of this music has spent long enough in the repertoire of the period-instrument Salzburg Haydn Quintet to have truly settled. But the music itself is compelling.

**Joachim Raff** is a composer I'd previously only encountered as a composer of piano music and symphonies. He was a fascinating man – composer, one-time assistant to Liszt and distinguished pedagogue – ahead of the game when he set up a class

specifically for women composers at the Hoch Conservatory, of which he was director. He was highly self-critical and published only eight quartets, all of which are full of personality. Just sample the main theme of the Second's opening movement and see if you can excise it from your mind. The Mannheim Quartet give fastidious and finely honed readings, alive to Raff's every nuance and laying bare his soul in the rocking slow movement of the Fourth; the finale of the same quartet is also notable for the way its slow introduction pieces together earlier elements before setting off in a wholeheartedly jaunty manner. Raff certainly learnt from Beethoven's example in terms of structural sleights of hand, and the Eighth Quartet, subtitled 'in canonic form', manages the genre's restrictions with tremendous dexterity. A fascinating addition to the catalogue.

Unlike Raff, **Czerny** published none of his string quartets, though he wrote at least 20. It's ironic that his reputation is so linked with the piano, for he sounds so at home with a strings-only medium. All four pieces included here are substantial in every sense, and two of them are world premieres – the result of a certain amount of detective work on the part of the Sheridan Ensemble's cellist Anna Carewe. The players are splendidly alive to the music, with readings full of vivacity. The tensile *Scherzo* of the D minor Quartet sounds like Mendelssohn on steroids, while they share with us a delighted sense of discovery in the D major Quartet. And while there's plenty of energy when needed, there's also an airiness which gives the textures an entrancing luminosity, enhanced by a natural-sounding recording. A real find. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Graf** Five String Quartets  
*Via Nova Qt*  
CPO ⑤ CPO777 865-2



**Boccherini** Six String Quartets, Op 15  
*Alea Ens*  
Dynamic ⑤ CDS7704



**M Haydn** Complete String Quintets  
*Salzburg Haydn Qt*  
CPO ⑤ ② CPO777 907-2



**Raff** String Quartets Nos 2-4 & 8  
*Mannheim Qt*  
CPO ⑤ ② CPO777 004-2



**Czerny** String Quartets  
*Sheridan Ens*  
*Capriccio* ⑤ ② C5234

but the newcomers have the edge in the *Grand Duo*, which emerges even more clearly as a light-hearted, even frivolous set of virtuoso variations intended to entertain. Recorded in a more airy acoustic than the Naxos pair, they revel in its playfulness, helped not a little by Pöntinen's wonderful *leggiere* touch and their response to the ping-pong tarantella finale.

The only other bravura work is Liszt's arrangement of his Twelfth *Hungarian Rhapsody* (the violin part was prepared in collaboration with Joseph Joachim, though the booklet doesn't tell you). This comes off splendidly, though I shan't discard a performance on a third disc of Liszt violin-and-piano works that I managed to overlook in my Naxos review: Chris Nicholls and Jonathan Ayerst (Hyperion), recorded back in 1994, open their disc with the *Rhapsody* and also include the *Grand Duo* and *Epithalam*, as well as the Duo Sonata (based on a Chopin mazurka) which opened the Naxos disc. Again, it's a close-run thing but I prefer Hyperion's sound, with Nicholls and Ayerst in performances that have all the zest and spontaneity of a live concert. As for the remainder of the (unduplicated) BIS programme, there's the charming and somewhat sentimental *Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth*, *Romance oubliée* and the sombre violin-and-piano version of *La lugubre gondola*. So the repertoire choice is down to your preferences; but between the three discs you have fine recordings of all Liszt's major works in this form.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

*Grand Duo, Elegy No 2, Epithalam* – selected comparison: *Promiewicz, Waleczek (5/15) (NAXO) 8 573145*

*Rhapsody, Grand Duo, Epithalam* – selected comparison: *Nicholls, Ayerst (HYPE) CD A66743*

## McLeod

'Moments in Time'

The Song of Icarus. The Song of Dionysius.

A Moment in Time. The Song of Phryne.

The Song of Leda

**Red Note Ensemble**

Delphian Ⓢ DCD34155 (59' • DDD)



A perennial 'dark horse' among contemporary composers, Aberdeen-

born John McLeod goes into his ninth decade with his profile arguably at its highest since his orchestral work *Shostakovich Connection* caught the public imagination four decades ago. This new disc of chamber music focuses on a tetralogy of pieces with its inspiration in

classical mythology – the earliest of which, *The Song of Phryne* (1974), combines pointedly Bartókian exchanges for clarinet and piano with a rather self-conscious tape evocation of the courtesan in question. Better integrated in formal and expressive matters, *The Song of Icarus* (1976) is a visceral depiction of its subject's ill-fated flight across the Aegean, while *The Song of Dionysius* (1989) draws a range of intricacies from percussion and piano (not least an initial phase of role-swapping) in its evoking of the ominous acoustical chamber created by the protagonist. Best, though, is *The Song of Leda* (2010), which draws on Yeats's eponymous poem for an eventful 'translation' which culminates with one of the composer's most affecting conclusions.

At the centre of this disc, *A Moment in Time* (2002) encapsulates the example of 9/11 via its two-part structure – the often abrasive contrasts of 'Metamorphosis' making way for the relative inwardness of a 'Threnody' whose veiled allusions to the start of Messiaen's (identically scored) *Quartet for the End of Time* provide an unforced segue into the latter work during performance. Combative and assured playing by the Scottish contemporary music band Red Note Ensemble, with excellent sound and detailed booklet-notes that enhance a worthwhile 80th-birthday tribute.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## McGuire

Elegy. Euphoria. String Trio.

Entangled Fortunes. Quintet 2

**Red Note Ensemble**

Delphian Ⓢ DCD34157 (68' • DDD)



Economic theory doesn't inspire great music. However, the title-work of this wonderful collection of chamber music by the Scottish composer Eddie McGuire, *Entangled Fortunes*, is the exception to the rule. Commissioned by the wife of the Scottish economist and Nobel Prize winner Sir James Mirrlees for a 2002 gala concert in the latter's honour, McGuire's piano trio limns a rhapsodic dialectic symbolising, in the composer's words, 'some aspects of Mirrlees's economics', while vividly evoking 'two lives entangled in a love affair', 'the striving entanglements of the poor', and 'Capital and Labour struggling for survival'.

Indeed, there's more dialecticism than eclecticism in these works, as minimalist

and modernist influences argue with traditional tonal- and modal-based material to forge a rich synthesis, the sheer lyricism of which leaves dry intellectual concerns floating like so much jetsam in its ecstatic wake. Thus the opening *Elegy* (1991), again for piano trio and written in memory of the composer's father, who died the previous year, juxtaposes original material with snatches of 'Londonderry Air' and an extended appropriation of the 'Mingulay Boat Song'. *Euphoria* (1980), whose pullulating yet minimalism-fuelled seven sections vibrate with an attractive palette of strings, woodwind and percussion, reflects the fraught politics of the time while radiating pure pleasure. The String Trio and *Quintet 2*, both dating from the mid-1980s, make a sublime virtue of tensions between song and dance, consonance and dissonance, economy and *the* economy.

The Red Note Ensemble's performances are as vital and coherent as the music itself. Andrew Stewart's informative and perceptive booklet-notes are the icing on the cake. **William Yeoman**

## Mendelssohn

String Quartets – E flat; No 1, Op 12;

No 4, Op 44 No 2

**Escher Quartet**

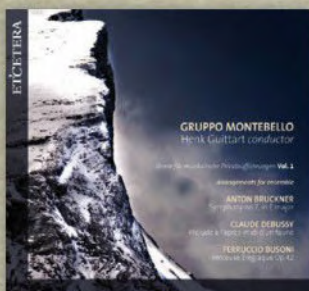
BIS Ⓢ BIS1960 (80' • DDD/DSD)



Since their Zemlinsky recordings (Naxos, 10/13, 9/14), the Escher Quartet has

acquired a new second violinist: Aaron Boyd. With Mendelssohn, they enter a rather more crowded arena, though relatively few groups have included the E flat major Quartet, written when the composer was 14. It's a work that shows diligence and a confidence with classical form without yet having attained the individuality that was to set the Octet alight. The Escher are fervent advocates of this early quartet, imbuing the slow movement with a luxuriant warmth. They clearly see the Minuet as a throwback to those of Haydn, whereas the period-instrument Eroica Quartet, at a noticeably faster pace on Harmonia Mundi, see the glimmer of a *scherzo* in the air. The prim and proper fugue that closes the work is arguably more effective at the Eroica's fleeter speed.

Pacing can be an issue for the Escher elsewhere too. They take the smoulderingly beautiful slow movement of Op 12 so spaciouly that it begins to sound contrived, overblown. The Alban Berg and Quatuor



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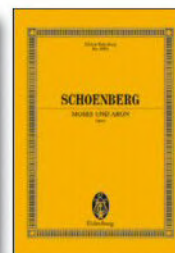
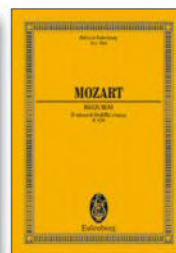
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**Eulenburg**

Mosaïques are all the more effective for a slightly plainer approach. And I wonder whether the 'Canzonetta' works best when there's slightly more relationship between the tempi of the outer and middle sections – though there's no question of the Escher's virtuosity in the *più mosso*.

In Op 44 No 2 they find just the right momentum for the first movement and a pleasing clarity of texture. The ricocheting notes of the *Scherzo* can come to seem a bit violent (it's perhaps no coincidence that this is a trademark of the Emerson, who have championed the Escher); the Leipzig are notably more subtle here. But put the Escher alongside the Elias and you find in the latter playing that takes more risks, such is the security of the group as a whole. Perhaps the Escher's new line-up simply needs a little more time, for there's no doubting the players' musicianship or technical ability, which are caught with admirable immediacy.

#### Harriet Smith

*String Quartet No 1 – selected comparisons:*

*Mosaïques Qt (9/98) (NAIV) E8622 or E8935*

*Alban Berg Qt (4/02) (EMI) 557167-2*

*String Quartet No 4 – selected comparisons:*

*Elias Qt (10/09) (WIGM) WHLIVE0028*

*Leipzig Qt (MDG) MDG307 1168-2*

*String Quartet in E flat – selected comparison:*

*Eroica Qt (HARM) HMU90 7245*

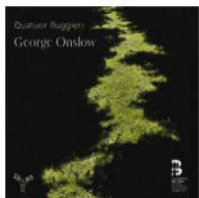
## Onslow

String Quartets – Op 8 No 1;

Op 8 No 3; Op 10 No 3

Ruggieri Quartet

Aparté Ⓢ API05 (62' • DDD)



Born in Clermont-Ferrand of Anglo-French parentage (his father

was a maverick MP who fled England to avoid prosecution, his mother an Auvergne aristocrat), George Onslow (1784-1853) led something of a double life as gentleman farmer and prolific purveyor of chamber music. Admiringly dubbed 'the French Beethoven' in his lifetime, he rapidly fell out of favour after his death; and if he has a reputation today, it is for blandly euphonious neo-classicism.

For Robert Schumann, Onslow and Mendelssohn were the only contemporary composers of string quartets worthy to be mentioned in the same breath as Beethoven. If Onslow is flattered by both comparisons, there is much appealing and expertly crafted music in these three quartets, published in 1814 and recorded here for the first time. His was an

essentially easy-going temperament; and while Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven are the reference points, his music has little of their developmental rigour. Even when Onslow flirts with the darker side, as in the outer movements of the C minor Quartet, Op 8 No 1, jauntiness quickly intrudes. But he is a fluent master of varied quartet textures, with a nice feeling for harmonic surprise. Befitting a fine amateur cellist, he showcases his own instrument at moments such as the soulful *bel canto* duetting in the C minor Quartet's *Adagio*. Other highlights include Op 10 No 3's piquant rustic Minuet, with a Trio based on an Auvergne folksong, and the faintly exotic *Andante* of Op 8 No 3, where Spanish bolero rhythms and twanging guitars receive a civilising Gallic makeover.

Devoted Onslow advocates, the young French period-instrument Quatuor Ruggieri give lucid, rhythmically supple performances, graceful of phrase, crisp of conversational interplay. Their clean, 'straight' tone is warmed by a modest, selective use of vibrato. Except for the rather cautious-sounding *Presto* finale of the C minor Quartet, tempi and character seem shrewdly judged, whether in the relaxed, playful discourse of Op 8 No 3's opening *Allegro* (sounding like a more compliant Haydn), the eager spring and snap of the minuets – each of them a *scherzo* in spirit – and the (by Onslow's standards) explosive contrasts in the finale of Op 10 No 3. The 'charm, fluidity, elegance and flair' that the enthusiastic booklet-note writer finds in these quartets aptly summarises the Ruggieri's delightful playing. **Richard Wigmore**

## Rudorff

Sextet, Op 5<sup>a</sup>. Six Piano Pieces, Op 52<sup>b</sup>. Three Romances, Op 48<sup>b</sup>. Capriccio appassionato, Op 49<sup>a</sup>. Concert Etudes, Op 29<sup>b</sup> – No 1; No 2. Romance<sup>ab</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Viller Valbonesi pf <sup>a</sup>Berolina Ensemble

Dabringhaus und Grimm Ⓢ MDG948 1889-6 (76' • DDD/DSD)



There is so much music from the 19th century that remains forgotten or under-

performed. Whenever a relatively unfamiliar name heaves into view, the prospect of an exciting discovery, of some unknown little gem or even (rarely) a substantial masterpiece presents itself. Raff, Reinecke and Rheinberger are among those who have turned up trumps in the past.

Would a fourth near-contemporary 'R' do the same? Alas, no.

Ernst Rudorff (1840-1916) was a distinguished pedagogue appointed (by Joseph Joachim) in 1869 as the first professor of piano at Berlin's new Hochschule für Musik, where he remained until his retirement in 1910. One of his pupils was Leopold Godowsky, who found Rudorff 'very dry and pedantic' (he walked out of his class after only 12 weeks). Of Rudorff's works, *Grove* (1900 edition) opined: 'The composer, we will not say over-loads them with detail, but over-elaborates them. This has kept [them] from being as well-known as they deserve.' This was generous. Rudorff's music is as well-crafted and technically accomplished as you would expect but it is the music of a Herr Professor with a stunning lack of originality and memorable ideas.

The early (1865) Sextet meanders along pleasantly enough in its Schumannesque way without anything to grab the attention until the last movement, far too late to redeem the work. The polished Berolina Ensemble (three violins, viola and two cellos) make the most of it. Brahms's influence is clearly heard in the selection of piano solos which follow, the earliest of which are the two short virtuoso Concert Etudes, Op 29, appearing 15 years after the Sextet; the latest, far more reflective and confidential, are the Six Piano Pieces, Op 52, from 1909. I can't say I took to Viller Valbonesi's playing of these. A serial competition entrant, his tone above *forte* is rather coarse and his hectoring manner militates against any affection he might feel for the music. The recording is up to MDG's customary high standard, and the booklet is informative and well translated, though English never uses «these» for quotes: we prefer 'these'.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## '20th-Century Women Composers'

<sup>b</sup>Beach Piano Trio, Op 50. Chanson d'amour, Op 21 No 1<sup>a</sup>. June, Op 51 No 3<sup>a</sup>. A Mirage, Op 100 No 1<sup>a</sup>. Stella viatoris, Op 100 No 2<sup>a</sup> **L Boulanger** D'un matin de printemps. D'un spor triste **R Clarke** Piano Trio

<sup>a</sup>Lorna Windsor sop **Trio des Alpes** Dynamic Ⓢ CDS7717 (70' • DDD)



Rebecca Clarke, Lili Boulanger and Amy Beach were pioneers at a time when musical careers for women were limited away from the operatic stage. British-born



The Ruggieri Quartet, who give 'lucid, rhythmically supple performances' of works by George Onslow on Aparté

Clarke (1886-1979) defied paternal ostracism to forge a path for herself as composer and viola player, though she also wrote under the pseudonym Anthony Trent and found that 'his' work attracted more critical attention than pieces produced under her own name. Boulanger (1893-1918), encouraged by the Franco-Russian family that included elder sister Nadia (who believed Lili's talents exceeded her own), was the first female winner of the Prix de Rome. Beach – the formidably respectable Mrs HHA Beach, as she styled herself – was the first American woman to tackle large symphonic and choral forms in addition to the songs on which her reputation rests.

The fine Swiss-Italian Trio des Alpes thoughtfully assess a variable collection of their chamber works. Beach is notably conservative and her 1938 String Trio, once past a provocative cascade of whole-tone scales at the start, rapidly settles into post-Brahmsian rectitude. She's better represented by the songs with ensemble accompaniment, though their impact is blunted by soprano Lorna Windsor, unsteady, bottled-sounding and not always helped by the close recording. Boulanger's two pieces were written shortly before her

tragic death aged only 24; the first, *Un soir triste*, sustains a series of quietly shifting, unresolved dissonances over its compelling 11-minute span. Clarke's 1921 Trio is the real revelation, a work of almost Bartókian asperity, tautly controlled and haunted by a reiterated, jabbing monotone that never lets the music or the listener settle. It also gets by far the best performance – fluent, committed and wonderfully energetic throughout. **Tim Ashley**

### 'British Works for Cello and Piano, Vol 4'

**RR Bennett** Cello Sonata **Hoddinott** Cello Sonata No 2, Op 96 No 1 **Leighton** Partita, Op 35 **Lutyens** Constants, Op 110

**Paul Watkins** vc **Huw Watkins** pf  
Chandos © CHAN10862 (68' • DDD)



In bringing together four highly contrasting British composers of the later 20th century, this vibrant recording, with splendid playing by Paul and Huw Watkins, demonstrates the extent of the

cello's inspiration and versatility in a range of modern idioms. The instrument's propensity for lyricism and sustained line is maintained as a feature of all the works, but there is much scope for the exploitation of the cello's percussive capabilities as well as its extraordinary range, variety of tessituras and changing timbres.

This is evident in the earliest work featured here – Kenneth Leighton's Partita (1959) – which begins with a singing, searingly haunting Elegy, a rhythmically dynamic *Scherzo* (typical of Leighton's compelling 'mechanistic' *moto perpetuo* style) and, in a microcosm of contrasting movements, a Theme and Variations, effectively a suite of character pieces. Lutyens's *Constants* (1976), more overtly expressionist in temperament, derives its title from a series of restricted harmonic and melodic intervals which feature throughout the three movements, though, even within this more challenging avant-garde dialogue between the two players, the cantabile properties of the cello ring through in the 'Lament' and 'Canticle'.

Composed a year later, Alun Hoddinott's Second Sonata begins in restive mood and



# DUTTON EPOCH NEW RELEASE

## American world premiere recordings\*

### Henry Kimball Hadley

Salome – tone poem  
Scherzo Diabolique\*  
San Francisco\*  
Othello Overture\*  
The Enchanted Castle\*  
Cleopatra's Night\*

\* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS  
**BBC Concert ORCHESTRA**  
Rebecca Miller (conductor)

CDLX 7319 ▶



Henry Kimball Hadley (1871-1937) was one of the leading American composers of the inter-war years and before. He developed his art from music founded in that of the German late romantic composers, but he subsequently searched for the roots of a distinctive American style, his musical car-ride *Scherzo Diabolique* being the *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* of its time. This Dutton Epoch survey presents six varied scores – all splendid discoveries – from across Hadley's career in mostly world premiere recordings.

### John Alden Carpenter

Concertino for piano and orchestra  
Patterns for piano and orchestra\*  
Krazy Kat  
Carmel Concerto\*  
\* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS  
**BBC Concert ORCHESTRA**  
Keith Lockhart (conductor)  
Michael Chertock (piano)

CDLX 7321 ▶

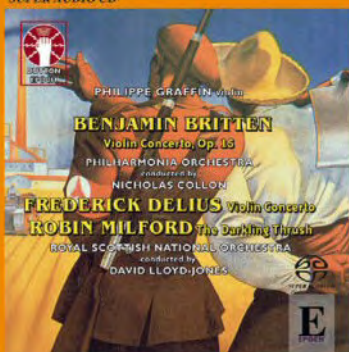


John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951) was a descendant of the very John Alden Carpenter who arrived at Plymouth (Massachusetts) on the Mayflower. He was one of the earliest to incorporate jazz and Latin/Spanish-flavoured "popular" music into his scores. In his day, he enjoyed a remarkable success, his music promoted by many leading conductors and orchestras. This Dutton Epoch release features brilliant American pianist Michael Chertock and conductor Keith Lockhart, who bring verve and panache to the popular *Concertino* for piano and orchestra and the world premiere recording of Carpenter's later *Patterns* for piano and orchestra. Also presented here is the delightful jazz-ballet *Krazy Kat* and Carpenter's Leopold Stokowski commission, the beautiful *Carmel Concerto*.



SUPRA AUDIO CD

## VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, BRITTEN, DELIUS & MILFORD



### BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Violin Concerto op.15  
Philippe Graffin (violin)  
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA  
Nicholas Collon (conductor)

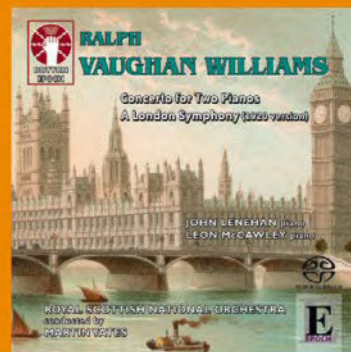
### FREDERICK DELIUS

Violin Concerto  
Philippe Graffin (violin)

### ROBIN MILFORD

*The Darkling Thrush*  
Philippe Graffin (violin)  
ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA  
David Lloyd-Jones (conductor)  
◀ CDLX 7320

Violinist Philippe Graffin couples his recording of Britten's bittersweet Violin Concerto with Delius's Violin Concerto, the latter given special resonance by being played from the perspective of Albert Sammons's extensively marked playing copy of the solo part. To both works, Graffin brings a personal view and warmly expressive playing. The programme is completed by a world premiere recording of Robin Milford's delightful *The Darkling Thrush* for violin and orchestra, a sort of wintertime *Lark Ascending* after a Thomas Hardy poem. Dating from 1928, this gloriously atmospheric piece proves to be a worthwhile discovery that all enthusiasts for inter-war English orchestral music will want to explore.



### RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

A London Symphony (1920 version)  
Concerto for Two Pianos  
John Lenehan (piano)  
Leon McCawley (piano)  
ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA  
Martin Yates (conductor)  
◀ CDLX 7322

This enthralling Vaughan Williams programme couples two wonderful alternative versions of great works. Vaughan Williams's two-piano version of his craggy Piano Concerto reinforces its standing as in many ways the link between the Third and Fourth Symphonies. Here the barnstorming piano team of John Lenehan and Leon McCawley with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Martin Yates are thrilling in their traverse of this cherished score. The programme is completed by the 1920 version of *A London Symphony*, not recorded since Goossens's wartime 78s. Here, for the first time in modern sound, we have the opportunity of exploring those various moments that RVW deleted from the version generally played.

## BACK IN THE CATALOGUE

### SIR HENRY WALFORD DAVIES

Sir Henry Walford Davies  
Solemn Melody for Cello & Organ; *Jesu dulcis memoria*  
Interlude in C; Chorale for Organ; Fugue in B flat  
Memorial Melody in C; Solemn Melody for Organ  
Reverie for Organ & Two Voices O *Jesu*,  
*King most wonderful*

Jongen Prélude Élégiacque op.47 no.1

Darke Chorale Fantasia on Darwell's 148th

*Ye Holy Angels Bright* op.20 no.2

Thalben-Ball Elegy for Organ

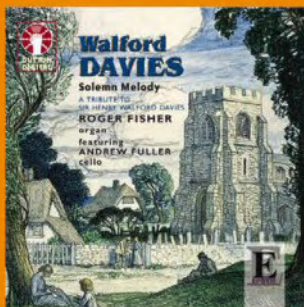
Thalben-Ball (arr Fisher) Elegy in B flat for Cello & Organ

Sir Hubert Parry Chorale Fantasia on the Old 100th

Roger Fisher (organ); Andrew Fuller (cello)

Recorded on the Rothwell organ at St George's Church, Headstone, Harrow, 24-26 October 2000

CDLX 7108 ▶



### JOHN MCCABE

ARTHUR PENDRAGON

Ballet Suite no.1: Arthur Pendragon

Piano Concerto no.1

Pilgrim for Double String Orchestra

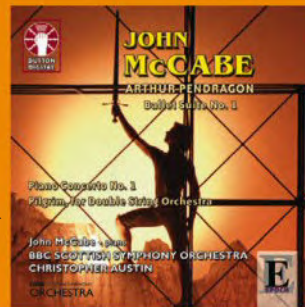
John McCabe (piano)

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

Christopher Austin (conductor)

Recorded at City Halls, Glasgow, 12–14 June 2006

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is striking for its economic contrapuntal textures (often in no more than two parts), especially in the central, meditative slow movement. Richard Rodney Bennett's Sonata of 1991, with its air of post-serial romanticism (and not without a whiff of Alban Berg), is a powerful work, full of structural invention on several architectural levels, though, of the four movements, I find the concluding miniature set of variations the most engaging for its clarity and imaginative design. **Jeremy Dibble**

## 'Live from Lugano 2014'

**Beethoven** Variations on 'Bei Männern', WoO46<sup>a</sup> **Borodin** Piano Quintet<sup>b</sup> **Bridge** Cello Sonata<sup>c</sup> **Mendelssohn** Symphony No 1, Op 11 (arr Busoni)<sup>d</sup> **Milhaud** La création du monde, Op 81<sup>e</sup> **Mozart** Piano Concerto No 20, K466<sup>f</sup> **Poulenc** Cello Sonata<sup>g</sup>. Sonata for Piano Four Hands<sup>h</sup> **Scriabin** Fantasy, Op posth<sup>i</sup> **Weinberg** Violin Sonata No 5, Op 53<sup>j</sup> <sup>affiliates</sup> **Martha Argerich** *pf* with <sup>b</sup>**Andrey Baranov**, <sup>c</sup>**Michael Guttman**, <sup>d</sup>**Géza Hosszu-Legocky**, <sup>e</sup>**Gidon Kremer**, <sup>f</sup>**Dora Schwarzberg** *vns* <sup>g</sup>**Nora Romanoff** *va* <sup>h</sup>**Gautier Capuçon**, <sup>i</sup>**Mark Drobinsky**, <sup>j</sup>**Mischa Maisky**, <sup>k</sup>**Jing Zhao** *vcs* <sup>l</sup>**Dagmar Clottu**, <sup>m</sup>**Anton Gerstenberg**, <sup>n</sup>**Daniel Gerstenberg**, <sup>o</sup>**Eduardo Hubert**, <sup>p</sup>**Alexander Mogilevsky**, <sup>q</sup>**Gabriela Montero**, <sup>r</sup>**Francesco Piemontesi**, <sup>s</sup>**Daniel Rivera**, <sup>t</sup>**Akame Sakai**, <sup>u</sup>**Lilya Zilberstein** *pfs* **Svizzera Italiana Orchestra / Jacek Kasprzyk** Warner Classics © ③ 2564 61346-0 (3h 15' • DDD)



Even more than some years' instalments, Lugano 2014 is a celebration

not just of the inimitable Argentinian but also of the most obscure alleyways of classical music. As ever, Argerich surrounds herself with personalities nearly as outsize as her own. We begin with Mozart, and the D minor Concerto that she performed so phenomenally at the 2013 Lucerne Festival with Abbado. How do they compare? The approach is largely similar as far as the soloist is concerned but the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana is a more traditional ensemble than Orchestra Mozart, with plusher-sounding wind that can't quite compare with Abbado's in terms of intensity.

The first disc travels from dark to light, the Mozart followed by Beethoven's (largely) uproarious Variations on 'Bei Männern' from *The Magic Flute*, with Maisky and Argerich egging each other on; they play with great spirit, without Maisky overdoing the vibrato as he sometimes can. From there to Milhaud's arrangement for piano quintet of his own

*La création du monde*. To my ears, this isn't a patch on the orchestral version, and it's not the easiest of pieces to bring off – there are more than a few textural challenges – and on occasion I found first violinist Dora Schwarzberg's vibrato-rich tone somewhat overbearing. But the Fugue is delivered with due welly, even if the *scherzo* is slightly raw in places. Similarly, Busoni's arrangement of Mendelssohn's First Symphony, which opens disc 2, sounds a bit relentless in its eight-hands, two-pianos garb. The accentuation can border on the overenthusiastic on occasion; and though it's generally extremely well co-ordinated, there is the odd patch of hurrying. The finale has plenty of *con fuoco* but again I'd question whether this is a better medium than Mendelssohn's original.

Poulenc fares particularly well on this set, Lugano regular Gautier Capuçon joined by Francesco Piemontesi for a rendition of the Cello Sonata that balances warmth and wit, anguish and seriousness, with the more poignant elements (particularly the slow movement) potentially realised thanks to Capuçon's songful tone. The brief four-hand Piano Sonata, too, played by Argerich and Dagmar Clottu, offers an ebullient reminder of Poulenc's love for Stravinsky. Frank Bridge's wartime Cello Sonata (this time Capuçon with Gabriela Montero) is particularly telling in its more nostalgic moments, with the cellist tending to soften its more modernist edges in the finale. The recording here, too, seems particularly close, catching every breath.

We turn to Russia for the remaining works. Borodin's Piano Quintet is still not that well known, and to be honest it's not difficult to work out why, despite a wholehearted performance. The brief first movement in particular seems to score more highly on gesture than on memorability. The best is found in the rambunctious *Scherzo* – where the rhythmic timing is pinpoint – which encloses an altogether gentler Trio.

The Scriabin Fantasy, however, is a more intriguing rarity, fervently played by Alexander Mogilevsky and Daniel Rivera. And to end, Weinberg's Fifth Violin Sonata, a work Gidon Kremer has consistently championed. The piece exudes such intensity that you don't need to know that it was written just after his release from Lubyanka prison in 1953. It unfolds from the opening recitative-like writing, via the energy and ire of the second movement (brilliantly caught by Kremer and Argerich, the latter letting rip

in the final stomping piano chords) and an increasingly unfettered *scherzo*, to a finale that begins edgily and proceeds to work through the moods of the previous movements, before ending in a mood of serenity. It's a riveting performance, and one of the highlights of a compelling box.

**Harriet Smith**

*Mozart – selected comparison:*

*Argerich, Orch Mozart, Abbado (3/14) (DG) 479 1033GH*

## 'New Irish Music'

**Byrne Saxophone Quartet No 1** **Edge Three**

**Etudes Irvine** 'Just a little lighter cut of the same girls' **Nangle** iridescent cobalt glow i, ii, iii

**I Wilson** heaven lay close II

**Chatham Saxophone Quartet**

RTÉ Lyric FM © RTECD149 (47' • DDD)



The Chatham Saxophone Quartet has certainly advanced the cause of Irish new

music for its medium with this recital which, while relatively short on playing-time, unfolds seamlessly as a programme. Bryan Byrne's First Saxophone Quartet launches proceedings with its compact take on sonata design and alternation between pensiveness and impetus, the latter purposefully gaining the upper hand in an exhilarating close. Ian Wilson's *heaven lay close* began life as music for tabla and string quartet, but this transcription effects no less imaginative a meeting of cultures, played out over four movements which between them constitute a trajectory that is symphonic in its expressive range and formal cohesion. Very different is Brian Irvine's pithy conjuring-up of an American cattle auctioneer – the latter's hectic discourse (recorded in situ) given presence and not a little humour in the context of those cavorting saxophones. Contrast again with *iridescent cobalt glow*, Jonathan Nangle's artful yet affectionate take on both the graphics and colours of 1980s video games, whose three sections amount to a teasing entity.

To close, Kenneth Edge's Three Etudes with their respective evocations of incessant talking, passing mayhem and two people who find themselves contentedly lost amid the 'scenic routes' of their conversation. An understated yet eloquent way in which to round off a disc that amply underlines why the CSQ have rapidly established themselves at the forefront of their field, enhanced by vividly immediate sound and with succinctly informative booklet-notes. Hopefully a follow-up recital will not be long in coming. **Richard Whitehouse**

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meets new

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between Icelandic history  
and European  
modernity.

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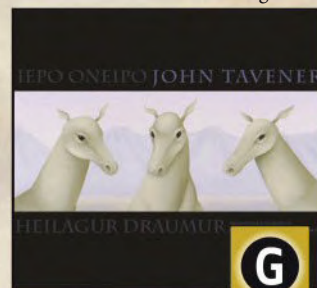
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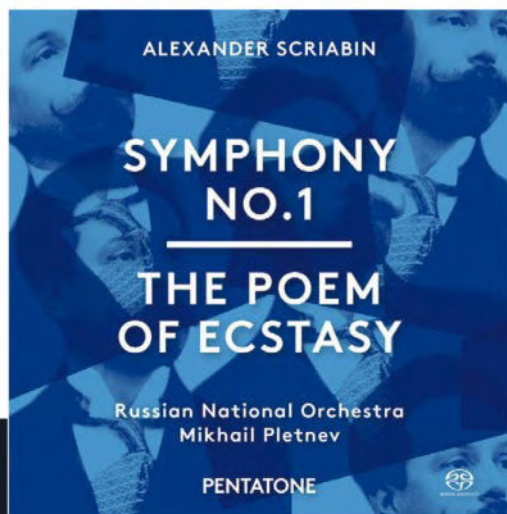
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# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## rites of passage

**David Fanning** listens to five recent recordings of Stravinsky's most famous ballet score in its reduction for two pianists



François-Frédéric Guy and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet: brilliant playing in their two-piano Rite on Chandos

A couple of years after the centenary of the infamous first performance of *The Rite of Spring* we have a spate of recordings of Stravinsky's piano four-hands version. What a fly-on-the-wall moment it must have been when he first introduced Diaghilev and his fellow Ballets Russes minions to what was soon to become the most iconic ballet of the 20th century. Still, it has to be asked whether this ersatz version – produced for study rehearsal purposes – has any more than documentary or practical value.

Of course there is always the reward of hearing two outstanding pianists sinking their teeth into the piece, especially when those two are **Daniel Barenboim and Martha Argerich**, live in concert – already available on CD (10/14) but now released on DVD. Despite having shared childhood musical experiences in Buenos Aires, they never actually formed a duo, but their joint charisma is worth witnessing for its own sake. Like a number of others they elect to play on two pianos rather than in the original duet format. My first experience of the two-piano option was many years ago from Peter Donohoe and Martin Roscoe, and this is how I've performed the work myself. The two-piano format has the obvious advantages of liberating the players technically, since it's impossible to create a quasi-orchestral range of colour when competing physically for the middle range on a single keyboard. It also means that the numerous places where Stravinsky was

forced to adapt or omit crucial layers of the texture can be corrected and/or enhanced.

Barenboim and Argerich do surprisingly little in this latter respect. For the most part they restrict themselves to the registers and textures of the duet layout, and they fail to correct the missing beat in the 'Jeu du rapt' (just before fig 44). Their sense of where the musical line is in the Prelude to Part 2, while reasonable enough for anyone reading the printed page, is quite unlike that of the orchestral score, and a glance at the latter would soon have put that right. The various technical slips don't matter in a live situation, and it's certainly true that the intricacies of the 'Glorification de l'Elue' and the 'Danse sacrée' are safely negotiated. But in general this is not a performance that was ready for recording, and given that neither player has a strong feeling for the Stravinsky idiom, the DVD is only recommendable for the effervescent and communicative Mozart Two-Piano Sonata and Schubert A flat Variations.

If this verdict on Barenboim and Argerich's *Rite* seems harsh, just sample any few seconds of **François-Frédéric Guy and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet**, who also take the two-piano option. First and foremost they know how much, or rather how little, the folk-based material can be bent before the idiom is lost. Then they have really done their homework in terms of the instruments at their disposal. True, there are different and further

options to the ones they take. But the colours, dynamics and textural finesse of this performance, enhanced by superbly lifelike recording, are breathtaking. The couplings here are Bavouzet's resourceful transcription of Debussy's *Jeux* and Zoltán Kocsis's of Bartók's *Two Pictures*. More brilliant playing here, though whether either transcription will catch on with other pianistic teams is an open question.

As for the three new versions of the *Rite* in its original piano-duet version, **Evelinde Trenkner and Sontraud Speidel** share some of Barenboim/Argerich's idiomatic shakiness – hear the wholly unfolklke 'expressivity' of their Part 1 Prelude, for instance. This and the feeble dynamic contrasts in the 'Action rituelle des ancêtres' (not to mention inferior recording quality) are cruelly shown up by the orchestral version on the same disc: a performance of no mean trenchancy that still lacks the depth of string tone of leading accounts. More satisfactory, both in terms of technical accomplishment and of recording, are the **Sivan Silver and Gil Garburg**, despite a funereal tempo for the 'Rondes printanières' (with tremolos unworthy of the name), and a *L'istesso tempo* into the 'Glorification' that flies in the face of the score. At a much higher level are **Norie Takahashi and Björn Lehmann**. From the bustling opening bars of Stravinsky's Concerto for two pianos, it is clear that this in an ensemble with superior rhythmic poise and technical prowess, and the Nancarrow and Herrmann fillers are definitely worth hearing, too. Sure enough, their *Rite* proves to be by far the most exciting and idiomatic of the new single-piano duet versions, and even manages to incorporate some of the additional texture normally only heard in two-piano accounts. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Stravinsky, Mozart, Schubert**

Argerich, Barenboim

EuroArts **D** DVD 205 9998



**Stravinsky, Bartók, Debussy** **G**

Guy, Bavouzet

Chandos **D** CHAN10863



**Stravinsky** The Rite of Spring

Piano Duo Trenkner Speidel et al

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Piano Duo Takahashi/Lehmann

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# Emma Kirkby

Lindsay Kemp profiles the well-loved soprano who in the early days of period performance defined what an early music voice was – and whose sound continues to compel today

In the late 1970s, distinguishing the iconic figures of the emerging British period-performance movement was not hard. But if the likes of Christopher Hogwood and Trevor Pinnock had a rather gentlemanly look compared with a Karajan or a Bernstein, their role in creating a new sound world for Baroque- and Classical-period music could not be doubted, and their legacy is still a potent one today. Perhaps one star shone in a brighter way than any other, however, and indeed continues to stand as a true icon of early music. This was not a conductor, but a soprano with no conservatoire training, and whose programme biographies, even after more than 40 years in the business, still state that she ‘originally had no expectations of becoming a professional singer’.

Emma Kirkby – Dame Emma since 2007 – has always liked to put her success down to luck, to being in the right place at the right time. Certainly, it is our good fortune that while studying Classics at Oxford in the late '60s she became a member of one of its leading student choirs, Schola Cantorum, conducted at the time by Andrew Parrott. Although she then embarked initially on a career as a schoolteacher, she was soon finding herself being booked by professional early music ensembles, among them the Taverner Choir, founded in 1973 by Parrott, who was by then her husband.

But while the light, crystalline quality of her voice was an ideal ingredient for Renaissance polyphony, it was almost certainly the way that its winning naturalness and freedom from overbearing vibrato matched the clean sounds and incisive articulation of period instruments that took her in the direction of being a soloist. (She herself says she learnt a lot from listening to

the sound of Baroque players.) Her immediately attractive and recognisable tone quickly won admirers, and by the end of the 1970s she had become a familiar and distinctive solo presence, both in the lute-song and madrigal repertoire she explored with Anthony Rooley and his Consort of Musicke (Rooley would later become Kirkby’s long-term partner with whom she had a son) and in Baroque and Classical choral repertoire with Hogwood’s Academy of Ancient Music, including Vivaldi’s *Nulla in mundo pax*

*sincera*, Couperin’s *Leçons de ténèbres* and works by Handel and Haydn. These were the performances that not only established her reputation, but also made her almost a definition in people’s minds of what an early music voice was; the freshness of her sound in some of them – for instance in a pristinely intelligent lute-song recital ‘The Lady Musick’, or in her smallish but telling role in the famous 1979 Hogwood *Messiah* – can still compel the listener today.

Kirkby continued to make recordings with the Consort, the Taverner and the Academy right through to the 1990s; and another group with whom she has long had a strong relationship is London Baroque. There have also been countless other collaborations, however (including an unforgettable contribution to the 1981 Hildegard of Bingen disc ‘A Feather on the Breath of God’, with Gothic Voices); and she has always maintained that the act of singing with others has brought her the greatest pleasure. Who could doubt that, after hearing her in the Consort’s Monteverdi madrigal series or gently lending her unmistakable timbre to the ensembles of Parrott’s one-to-a-part Bach B minor Mass of 1984? Delightfully blended duets on record with fellow sopranos Judith Nelson,

*Kirkby has always maintained that the act of singing with others has brought her the greatest pleasure*

## DEFINING MOMENTS

### • 1973 – *Music takes over*

After singing as a (Classics) student in Schola Cantorum of Oxford, Kirkby joins the Taverner Choir – the modest start of an unanticipated professional career

### • 1979 – *Like a refiner’s fire*

After several years of Handel, Haydn and Vivaldi with Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music, she has just three arias in their groundbreaking recording of *Messiah*, yet the rarely heard soprano version of ‘But who may abide’ produces one of her most scintillating moments on disc

### • September 14, 1981 – *Helping Hildegard on her way*

Sings on only two out of the eight tracks on the Hildegard of Bingen album ‘A Feather on the Breath of God’ from Gothic Voices – yet a typically standout account of *Columba aspexit* raises her, Hildegard and the Hyperion disc to cult status

### • 1999 – *Popular favourite*

The success of compilation albums such as ‘The Pure Voice of Emma Kirkby’ and ‘The Sweet Sound of Emma Kirkby’ brings wider fame and helps propel her to the title Classic FM Artist of the Year

### • July 2007 – *A Dame at last*

Kirkby’s DBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours list – for many, long overdue – was the first for a singer so strongly associated with the British early music movement. Typically, she accepted it on behalf of that community, and ‘as a celebration of the powers of ensemble, clarity and stillness, beyond those of volume and display’



Evelyn Tubb and Susanne Rydén have also testified to her ability to listen and adapt to others.

Yet inevitably it is as a soloist that she will long be cherished, whether in recital or in more public music. For years now, listeners have warmed to the bell-like purity of her voice and the sheer pleasure to be had from listening to the precision and beauty with which she moves from note to note. She has hardly ever appeared in opera – recordings of the role of Dorinda in Handel's *Orlando* under Hogwood, and Purcell's Dido in an influential early period version with Parrott are typically immaculate, but suggest that dramatic music is not a natural field for her. And while her Mozart recordings stood out at the time for their bright agility, they do not seem to have been so influential in

changing the way people think about how that repertoire should sound.

It is, after all, in Renaissance and Baroque repertoire that we can get closest to her, whether in thoughtfully planned song recitals or in larger ensembles. Here her intimacy with the music is at its clearest, as are the personal grace and modesty which characterise her approach to the art. Kirkby has always put text on an equal footing with the music, and both of those before herself. In these matters both musical and personal she has never compromised the principles with which she started out. No wonder she's one of the most respected and well-loved figures in the business. **G**

*Dame Emma Kirkby talks to James Jolly on an EFG Milestones podcast: click on the podcast link at [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk)*

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**Anthony Rooley**  
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(3/03)

# Instrumental



## Bryce Morrison reviews Vol 3 of David Wilde's Chopin on Delphian:

*'These are bear-bug performances where even the most outwardly fragile utterance is made as epic as Wuthering Heights'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



## Jed Distler on Vanessa Benelli Mosell's [R]evolution on Decca:

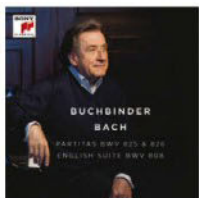
*'Stockhausen's spirit must be smiling upon the pianist's utmost precision in regard to dynamic scaling and rhythm'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**

## JS Bach

Keyboard Partitas – No 1, BWV825; No 2, BWV826. English Suite No 3, BWV808

Rudolf Buchbinder *pf*

Sony Classical © 88875 05330-2 (57' • DDD)



Rudolf Buchbinder offers Bach-playing of confidence and intelligence, unafraid

to ornament and keen to point up the drama of the music.

I have the impression that Bach is for him above all a serious composer: in the opening of the Second Partita, he emphasises the strong-jawed quality of the chordal writing, melting less than some – Perahia and Goode, for example – in the limp Adante that follows. Faster movements tend to be somewhat strait-laced: just compare the same Partita's Allemande with Anderszewski, live at Carnegie Hall. With this seriousness comes, at times, a lack of variety within the suites. By taking the Courante of BWV826 somewhat steadily and the following Sarabande relatively quickly, he lessens their characterfulness.

What I missed in these readings was a sense of sheer physical pleasure. The hand-crossing Gigue from the First Partita, for instance, is a model of finesse and joy in Perahia's performance, a careering speed-fest of the greatest ebullience in Anderszewski's, alongside which Buchbinder sounds steady and a touch po-faced. Similarly, in the Second Partita's closing Capriccio, there's none of the bubbling, quiet euphoria of Perahia's reading (and there's a curious misreading in bar 2, where Buchbinder plays an A flat rather than an A natural, but which he rights on the repeat).

The best thing in the Third English Suite is the Sarabande, to which Buchbinder lends a quiet poise. The Gavotte, though, sounds over-fussy compared to Anderszewski's play of light and shade. And while the Gigue is well-

intentioned, turn to the Pole and the music becomes positively airborne; if that's too extreme for your taste, the masterly Kempff offers a persuasive middle ground.

Harriet Smith

Partita No 1 – selected comparisons:

Anderszewski (1/03) (VIRG) 545526-2

Perahia (2/10) (SONY) 88697 44361-2

Partita No 2 – selected comparisons:

Goode (3/99) (NONE) 7559 79438-2

Perahia (7/08) (SONY) 88697 22695-2

Anderszewski (8/09) (VIRG) 267291-2

English Suite No 3 – selected comparisons:

Anderszewski (2/15) (WARN) 2564 62193-9

Kempff (DG) 439 108-2GH

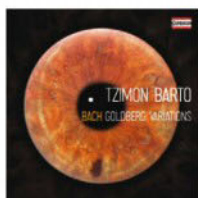
## JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988 (arr Busoni).

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV659

Tzimon Barto *pf*

Capriccio © C5243 (61' • DDD)



Busoni's arrangement of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* is faithful to the original and

presents few radical changes. And so I can only assume that Tzimon Barto's gothic inflation aims to recreate the spirit of Busoni's opulence rather than his austerity. Certainly no pianist has sounded more determinedly 'different' since the once heady days of Ivo Pogorelich. True, today's pianists often find themselves caught between Scylla and Charybdis, on the one hand accused of a cold academic literalism, on the other of an overly personalised interpretation. Yet nothing prepared me for Barto's heavily romanticised view, where ideas of the most profound simplicity are underlined with the heaviest of red pencils.

Already in Var 1 he startles with his braying *fortissimo* and over-emphasis, while Var 2 replaces musical grace and nuance with much distorting *rubato*. Does Var 11 need such coaxing, and why such a sentimental view of Var 15? There is a brief glimpse in Var 26 of truer quality

but, again, Var 25, Landowska's 'Black Pearl' with its timeless expressive beauty, is 'interpreted' close to parody. After Glenn Gould's mercurial genius (in either of his recordings) or Rosalyn Tureck's magisterial account (where she is every inch the 'High Priestess of Bach'), to say nothing of more recent and superb discs by András Schiff and Murray Perahia, Barto sounds audacious but false. For an encore he gives us a ponderous performance of the chorale prelude *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*. Capriccio's sound is impressive but the performance harks back to a time when pianists used a composer as a springboard for personal excess. **Bryce Morrison**

## JS Bach

'Bach in Montecassino'

Chorale Preludes – Allein Gott in der Hoh sei Ehr, BWV675; Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir, BWV687; Jesu, meine Freude, BWV753; Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV683; Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein, BWV668a. 'Chromatic' Fantasia, BWV903a. Duets, BWV802-805. Fantasias and Fugues – BWV537; BWV904. Fantasia super Jesu, meine Freude, BWV713. Fuga sopra il Magnificat, BWV733. Fughetta super Wir glauben all an einen Gott, BWV681. Kyrie drei Sätze BWV672-674. Das wohltemperirte Clavier – Fugue, BWV846; Prelude, BWV870

Luca Guglielmi *org*

Vivat © VIVAT108 (69' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Chiesa di San Nicolao, Alice Castello, Italy



Presenting Bach's organ music in fresh pastures is no easy feat but the programming

alchemy here is highly compelling. The first element is an original 1749 organ in Piedmont, mirroring the instrument that graced the Abbey of Montecassino before it was destroyed in 1944. The matching components are the renowned teacher (of Mozart among others), musicologist

and arranger Padre Martini, and performer-collector Friedrich Wilhelm Rust, whose family contributed significantly to the first complete edition of the composer's work, the Bach-Gesellschaft-Ausgabe. Their documented part in disseminating Bach's music in Italy in the 1760s inspires the content and topography of this most cultivated of recitals.

Luca Gugliemi – not to be confused with another fine Italian Bach organist, Lorenzo Ghielmi – is the critical element in the jigsaw, and not just because he offers a consistently probing clarity in his articulation and colouring, binding these strikingly diverse musical styles. More crucial is how the narrative of the Martini 'exhibition' unfolds with such grace and ardour: fascination lies in hearing sources of non-organ works, such as the febrile harpsichord *Fantasia chromatica* reimagined in the delectable bloom of Chiesa di Nicolao as well as the hauntingly soft-palettéd C minor *Fantasia*, alongside preludes of intimate subtlety and range.

Indeed, Gugliemi's scope is harnessed to the astutely characterised and moderate scale of the musical works, especially projecting the contemplative within the so-called 'Organ Mass', the *Clavierübung III* of 1739. There are some exceedingly sweet registration changes, none more so than in the ubiquitous *Jesu, meine Freude* (from the quartet of works just before), at 3'23". Gugliemi captures the imagination throughout while also celebrating those unheralded cognoscenti in the years immediately after Bach's death, and before post-Mendelssohn venerating. A finely chiselled and innovative project, warmly recommended.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

## Bartók · Debussy · Prokofiev

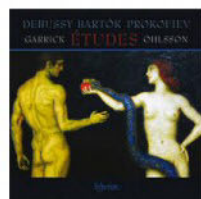
'Etudes'

**Bartók** Etudes, Op 18 **Debussy** Etudes

**Prokofiev** Etudes, Op 2

**Garrick Ohlsson** *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68080 (67' • DDD)



For his second recording of Debussy's 12 Etudes (the first was for Arabesque, 2/90), Garrick Ohlsson chooses the iconoclastic blaze of Prokofiev's four early Etudes and the alternating hyperactivity and interior life of Bartók's three Etudes for his coupling. So far so good. And yet if Debussy's late masterpiece is a crowning example of pragmatism (octaves, thirds,

sixths, etc) transmuted into an eerie and compulsive fantasy, Ohlsson's performance is one-sided. Scrupulously ordered and prepared at one level, it is studio-bound at another. Every 'i' is dotted, every 't' crossed, but mystery and evocation are kept very much at arm's length. There is too little of Gieseking's iridescence, Uchida's nervous intensity, Thibaudet's wit or Pollini's greater overall mastery. There is an element of stiffness in 'Pour les octaves', too little inclination to seek out hidden voices and patterns (particularly when you compare him with Van Cliburn – RCA), too literal a view of the Mediterranean luxuriance of 'Pour les agréments' and a tired response to the final 'Pour les accords', where Debussy's sinister march in jackboots lacks much of its menace.

Much the same could be said for Ohlsson's Prokofiev and Bartók. There is none of Freddy Kempf's youthful and characterful assault on the First Etude (Hyperion) or of Matti Raekallio's icy aplomb in all four (Ondine). Similarly, Zoltán Kocsis leaves Ohlsson far behind in the manic syncopated whirl of Bartók's Third Etude in particular. Hyperion's sound, like the playing, is less than ideally bold or resonant. **Bryce Morrison**

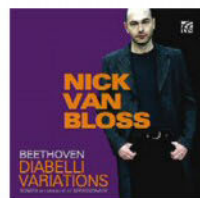
## Beethoven

Piano Sonata No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57.

Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, Op 120

**Nick Van Bloss** *pf*

Nimbus Alliance © NI6276 (80' • DDD)



First the positives. In Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations, Nick Van Bloss's supple precision brings out the shifting accents of Var 2's alternating hand patterns with expressive economy. No 8 receives an affectionate, lilting treatment, and if No 10's *Presto* doesn't race with abandon, the pianist's careful articulation illuminates Beethoven's displacements of phrase against the metre. Bloss gauges No 13's silences with a sense of comic timing worthy of mention alongside that of Charles Rosen's classic, long out-of-print reference recording. He shapes No 14's quick up-beats with vocally orientated flexibility and clarifies No 32's close, sticky fugal textures without pounding them to death.

Elsewhere, however, the work's large-scale design, cumulative momentum and elaboration of detail elude the pianist. Bloss flattens out Beethoven's trademark *subito* dynamics (Nos 5, 6 and 9) and underplays the music's rollicking, virtuoso brio in the

contiguous Nos 16 through 18 and in No 23's wild, scampering flourishes. Even the waltz theme's promising sprint slightly slows down as it progresses, while, conversely, No 1's march (with its inconsistently articulated *sforzandos*) lacks the gravitas of a true *Maestoso*.

The *Appassionata* Sonata also appears to be a work-in-progress for Bloss. It takes the pianist a little time to clearly establish a basic pulse for the first movement proper. While his brisk central *Andante con moto* variations couldn't be more unified, the finale's limited dynamic scope and cautious build-up in the coda do not represent Bloss at his unfettered, daring best. **Jed Distler**

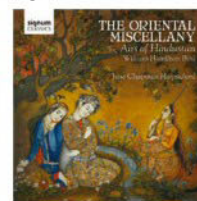
## WH Bird

The Oriental Miscellany – Airs of Hindustan.

Sonata for Harpsichord and Flute<sup>a</sup>

**Jane Chapman** *hpd* with **Yu-Wei Hu** *fl*

Signum © SIGCD415 (74' • DDD)



Given the slight, four-movement sonata that rounds off this fascinating disc, the music of William Hamilton Bird wouldn't ordinarily merit much attention. But the 30 short keyboard works that precede it are something different: a rare chance to explore the transnational dissemination of music from East to West. Transcribed – the term must be used very loosely – for harpsichord and guitar in the late 18th century, Bird's *Oriental Miscellany* isn't so much a catalogue of music in India during the era of East India Company rule as it is a testament to the powerful forces of assimilation, distortion and translation that governed the Western appropriation of Eastern art and culture.

Harpsichordist Jane Chapman has taken liberties with the original source, and for the most part they are welcome ones. In some cases, she has included extracts from another source, a collection of airs, which overlaps in places with Bird's, by the contemporaneous harpsichordist Sophia Plowden. She also takes full advantage of the sonic effects and exotic possibilities of the restored 1772 Jacob Kirckman harpsichord she has chosen for the recording. The range of colours and textures is dazzling, and at times wonderfully suggestive of the Indian sitar. She is free with repetitions and ornamentation, and occasionally adapts the simple bass-line for greater dramatic effect.

Listeners, however, should be careful to consult the original score (available online at the IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library) to

discover where Chapman's delicious improvised additions begin and end, because they are some of the most appealing moments on the recording. Otherwise, the casual listener will be misled into believing that Bird's ear for modal and harmonic colour, and his sensitivity to the more rhythmically dynamic and flexible Indian line, was far greater than it was. Bird's adaptations have occasional moments that suggest he was alert to something intractably 'other' in the music – unresolved phrase endings, chromatic surprises – but most of what sounds genuinely 'Indian' here is attributable to Chapman's smart framing of the originals.

Bird's style is typical of the *galant* era, harmonically simple-minded, insouciant and musically appealing, with many of the airs followed by variations calling for fluent fingerwork. In his introduction to the original publication, Bird makes clear that he sought out in Indian music regularity, especially familiar rhythmic patterns, and he self-consciously avoided Indian styles that didn't oblige. He wanted music that earned its welcome in a European social setting.

Chapman takes that mandate to heart, and even her more adventurous additions to Bird's score can be justified as invigorating showmanship. The playing is smart, clean, refined and inventive. If one is looking primarily for musical authenticity, she provides it in this sense: the recording captures the European delight in exotica, especially its liberating power on musical fancy. **Philip Kennicott**

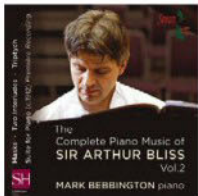
## Bliss

'Piano Music, Vol 2'

Masks. Two Interludes. Suite. Das alte Jahr vergangen ist. The Rout Trot. Triptych. 'Bliss'

**Mark Bebbington** *pf*

Somm Céleste © COMMCD0148 (62' • DDD)



The second volume in Mark Bebbington's welcome and

conspicuously classy survey of Bliss's complete piano output contains one premiere recording – and quite a find it proves to be! The three-movement Suite for piano was composed around 1912 (by which time Bliss was already a most proficient pianist) and certainly reveals a burgeoning, questing talent; its central Ballade in particular evinces an exciting dramatic and poetic scope that put me in mind of some of the astonishingly precocious offerings of

Herbert Howells (one of Bliss's contemporaries at the Royal College of Music). By the time we reach the exhilarating *Masks* (1924) and marvellous Two Interludes (1925), Bliss's emotional range had deepened immeasurably. Not only had he seen courageous and harrowing active service in the trenches but the death of his beloved younger brother Kennard at the Battle of the Somme had also come as a shattering blow; indeed, it's not hard to hear the sense of poignancy, loss and rage in the final two *Masks* (marked 'Sinister' and 'Military') and opening Interlude especially.

The meatiest fare on the disc comprises the *Triptych* that the septuagenarian composer wrote in 1970 for Louis Kentner – a wholly compelling, deeply felt statement, demanding not only formidable technical acumen but also unwavering powers of lofty concentration. It's framed in turn by two deliciously bluesy dance miniatures, 'Bliss' (*One-Step*) and *The Rout Trot* from 1923 and 1927 respectively. That just leaves the disarmingly tasteful and suitably pensive reworking of the chorale prelude *Das alte Jahr vergangen ist* ('The old year has ended'), Bliss's contribution to a collection of Bach arrangements for the modern piano devised by Harriet Cohen and published by Oxford University Press in 1932.

I'm happy to report that Bebbington's stylish and perceptive interpretations have been immaculately captured by producer Siva Oke and engineer Paul Arden-Taylor working in the helpful surroundings of Birmingham's Symphony Hall. What's more, Robert Matthew-Walker's authoritative booklet essay is a joy to read. All told, a super release.

**Andrew Achenbach**

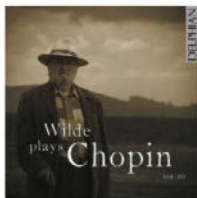
## Chopin

'Wilde Plays Chopin, Vol 3'

Three Ecosaises, Op 72 No 3. Etude, Op 10 No 3. Mazurkas – No 5, Op 7 No 1; No 6, Op 7 No 2. Nocturne No 13, Op 48 No 1. Polonaises – No 3, 'Military', Op 40 No 1; No 5, Op 44. Scherzo No 2, Op 31. Waltzes – No 3, Op 34 No 2; No 6, 'Minute', Op 64 No 1; No 7, Op 64 No 2; No 9, Op 69 No 1

**David Wilde** *pf*

Delphian © DCD34159 (65' • DDD)



Here once more, on his third Chopin recording for

Delphian, David Wilde presents a determined assault on traditional wisdom, on sweet-toned lyricism, on gently weaving, scented *rubato*. These are bear-hug performances where

even the most outwardly fragile utterance is made as epic as *Wuthering Heights*. From Wilde, the C minor Nocturne, most monumental of the genre, emerges at the slowest possible *lento*, every note weighted and underlined with significance, the central octave cannonades ablaze with defiance and the final *doppio movimento* pulled back rather than forwards for an added sense of cataclysm. Here and elsewhere one seems to see again the gaunt and tortured face of the composer as immortalised by Delacroix. The Second Scherzo is given with thunderous aplomb (the title more ironic than ever); and in the F sharp minor Polonaise Wilde packs a punch sufficient to have even the stoutest piano cowering in a corner.

He declaims the, for Chopin, unpianistic glory of the A major Polonaise to the heavens and his choice of the most elegiac of the Waltzes (Op 64 No 2 in C sharp minor) is significant given his overall approach. The companion Waltz in D flat may be more frantic than elegant, but even here and in the lightest fare (the *Trois Ecossaises*) Wilde's burning sincerity makes for compulsive if exhausting listening. He has again written his own notes, is excellently recorded, and if you like Chopin given with a steep and original slant rather than the sort that garners prizes on the competition circuit and in the exam room, then this is for you. **Bryce Morrison**

## Coke

Preludes – Op 33; Op 34. Variations, Op 37

**Simon Callaghan** *pf*

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0147 (77' • DDD)



Born into an affluent Derbyshire family with strong links to the military and ties

stretching all the way back to King Edward III, Eton-educated Roger Sacheverell Coke (1912-72) was a gifted pianist and composition pupil of John Frederic Staton and (later) Alan Bush. When he turned 21, his widowed mother gave him his own dedicated music studio (converted from a coach house and stable block), complete with an audience gallery and concert grand (the booklet shows a photo of him seated at his Steinway).

Coke produced a sizeable quantity of music (some of it broadcast by the BBC) including six piano concertos, three symphonies, over 100 songs and a three-act opera based on Shelley's play *The Cenci*. The latter was eventually staged in November 1959 at London's Scala Theatre



Jane Chapman at the Horniman Museum and Gardens on the Kirkman harpsichord featured on her Signum disc of WH Bird's 'Oriental Miscellany' (review on page 57)

under the baton of Eugene Goossens, but the critics savaged it, after which depression and ill-health took their toll (a chronically heavy smoker, Coke died just one week after his 60th birthday).

Coke also enjoyed the support of Benno Moiseiwitsch and Sergey Rachmaninov, and the Russian master's influence hovers benignly over the two substantial piano works revived here. Written between 1938 and 1941, the 24 Preludes are most idiomatically laid out for the instrument and evince a wealth of thoughtful, red-blooded inspiration and instinctive, fresh-faced poetry. If anything, though, the 15 Variations and finale from 1939 serve up a rather more individual and involving mix of big-hearted invention (try the tumbling No 14, marked *Allegro risoluto*), searching harmonic sensibility, intrepid expression and cogent sweep. This strikes me as a genuine discovery.

Simon Callaghan extracts every ounce of eloquence and fantasy from this intriguing repertoire, and Somm's engineering is clean and true to match. Wholly commendable, helpfully informative presentation, too. A bold release, in sum, which will handsomely reward readers who enjoy venturing off the beaten track.

**Andrew Achenbach**

## Dukas

Piano Sonata. La plainte, au loin, du faune....

Prélude élégiaque sur le nom de Haydn.

Variations, Interlude et Finale sur un thème de Rameau

**Hervé Billaut** *pf*

Mirare © MIR242 (71' • DDD)



Dukas's single Piano Sonata remains among the most formidable peaks of the repertoire,

a defiant assault on what is generally viewed as the French sensibility as exemplified by Debussy, Fauré and Ravel in their entirely individual ways. Daunted by Beethoven's example, all three arguably shied away from following suit; it was left to Dukas (and later Dutilleux and Boulez) to do so, composing a work of such imposing length and stature that it has even been described as 'the French *Hammerklavier*'.

For Cortot, the first movement was 'douloureuse, tourmentée par l'insistance de synopes palpitantes', at once suggesting the range and scale of things both present and to come. Part of what Mario Praz called 'the Romantic Agony', the idiom is

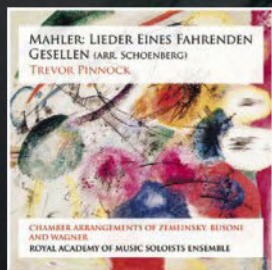
dark and forbidding, making outsize demands on the pianist's technique and stamina. The shadow of César Franck hangs over much of the writing and it is also possible to hear the influence of Dukas's 1900 Sonata on Szymanowski's even more massive Second Sonata (1910-11). The second movement, 'Calme', evolves into complexity and is followed, *vivement*, by a blazing virtuoso toccata with a central section alive with, for Cortot, a maleficent, nightmarish atmosphere. In the finale Dukas throws everything possible at the pianist, piling Pelion on Ossa, making the listener reel.

After such rhetoric, the *Rameau* Variations fall like balm on the ear, even when relaxation is short-lived and darker forces emerge. Finally, the *Prélude élégiaque sur le nom de Haydn* and an again powerful if relatively austere end. Hervé Billaut is fully equal to his Herculean task, though he is outclassed at every point by Marc-André Hamelin in the Sonata, where ease and flexibility erase any sense of strain and allow for the luxury of total musical freedom. All the same, I would never want to underestimate Billaut's overall brilliance, and he is finely recorded. **Bryce Morrison**

*Pf Son – selected comparison:*

*Hamelin (7/06) (HYPE) CDA67513*

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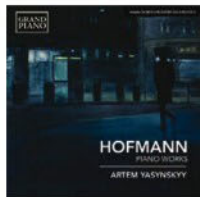
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## Hofmann

Charakterskizzen, Op 40. Etude for the Left Hand Alone, Op 32. Mazurkas - Op 16 No 1; B minor; D minor. Piano Sonata, Op 21. Theme with Variations and Fugue, Op 14  
**Artem Yasynskyy** *pf*  
 Grand Piano Ⓢ GP675 (69' • DDD)



Josef Hofmann was one of the very greatest pianists of the so-called Golden Age.

He was also an inventor (when he died in 1957 he had more than 70 patents to his name, including one for the car windscreen wipers we use today) and composer. Little of his music has made it on to disc, so this release, whatever its shortcomings (and they are few) sheds a welcome extra light on one of the most naturally gifted musicians in history. Hofmann's most recorded work is 'Kaleidoskop', the last of his four *Charakterskizzen* composed in 1908 and dedicated to Godowsky. It's a dazzling *tour de force* demanding extreme agility and imaginative tonal colouring. The Ukrainian pianist Artem Yasynskyy (*b* Donetsk, 1988) takes it at the more measured tempo (4'51") of Shura Cherkassky (Hofmann's pupil, for whom it was a favourite encore) rather than of Hofmann himself (4'25" live in Casimir Hall, 1938), let alone (the too fast?) Hamelin (4'14" – Hyperion, 12/01). Yasynskyy, with exemplary articulation, phrases the piece beautifully. The other three movements ('Vision', 'Jadis' and 'Nenien') have been recorded only once before (Fabiana Biasini in 2005 on Edition Hera); and if I have devoted this much space to *Charakterskizzen* it is because, of the seven works presented here, it encapsulates Hofmann at this best and most original.

There are three early mazurkas (two written when Hofmann was 10) which are charming Chopin pastiches; there is a very effective Etude for the left hand alone (indebted to Blumenfeld's and none the worse for that) and an attractive four-movement Sonata (modelled on Chopin's but more Schumannesque in some of its figurations). Finally we have the premiere recording of the substantial (16'06") single-movement Theme with Variations and Fugue from 1892 dedicated to Moszkowski, with whom Hofmann studied briefly. Lacking the individuality of *Charakterskizzen*, it nevertheless shows Hofmann's mastery of form and fugal writing at the age of 16.

Yasynskyy, despite the mild thump of the sustaining pedal, is well recorded, equal to

the giddy technical demands and, most importantly, with the compelling advocacy needed to show these neglected works in the best possible light.

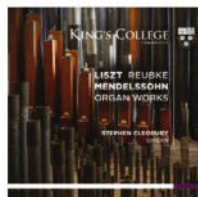
Jeremy Nicholas

## Liszt • Mendelssohn • Reubke

Liszt Fantasy and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam', S259 Mendelssohn Organ Sonata No 6, Op 65 No 6 Reubke Sonata on the 94th Psalm

**Stephen Cleobury** *org*

King's College Ⓢ KGS0010 (69' • DDD/DSD)  
 Played on the organ of King's College, Cambridge



Here are the two Everests of the organist's 19th century repertoire with a

sonata, placed between them, by the composer who, more than any other, 'revitalised the then-moribund European organ tradition' (Conor Farrington in his exemplary booklet-notes for this classily produced release). All three are linked by having a liturgical text as their mainspring: Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue, the fourth and by far the most imposing of his Illustrations of Meyerbeer's music, uses the melody sung by the three Anabaptists in Act 1 of *Le prophète* ('Ad nos, ad salutarem undam' – 'To us, the water of salvation'); Mendelssohn's D minor Sonata is a set of variations on the Lutheran Bach chorale *Vater unser im Himmelreich* (BWV416); Reubke's Sonata is explicitly based on the 94th Psalm, 'the Psalm of Vengeance'.

If you are not at the top of your game, there is little point in tackling the ferociously demanding Liszt and Reubke works – and Stephen Cleobury is on peak form. Clearly he has had the music in his fingers and feet for many years: one is left with the sense that all problems were solved long ago. He knows exactly how to convey the overriding shape of each piece and, of course, the King's College organ is 'his' instrument. He exploits its full resources with taste, discernment and piquancy (listen to the later part of the *Adagio* section of *Ad nos*).

These are outstanding performances by a great musician and the King's Harrison & Harrison is a magnificent instrument, but one notices – and it is heightened by the Chapel's acoustic – the unavoidable blurred details in some fast passagework and the lack of a really biting reed chorus and pedal division. This is especially true in the Reubke, the finest recording of which for me remains that of Roger Fisher at Chester

Cathedral in 1970 (Amphion, 8/71), where the pedal triplets in the final pages propel the music to a spine-tingling conclusion. The best coupling of the Liszt and Reubke: Simon Preston (DG, 7/85) in Westminster Abbey on another Harrison & Harrison but with a less gentlemanly demeanour than King's. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Mozart

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas - No 6, K284; No 12, K332; No 14, K457; No 16, K545. Fantasy, K475

**Christian Blackshaw** *pf*

Wigmore Hall Live Ⓢ ② WHLIVE0076 (103' • DDD)  
 Recorded live, September 25, 2012



Angular or strident sounds are not a part of Christian Blackshaw's technique.

Instead a horizontally even line and lucid touch sustain his vision of Mozart. Ancient words from Alec Rowley's assessment of the composer – 'limpid freshness, exquisite gracefulness, the music containing the essence of childhood and the fragrance of simplicity' – arise in part when confronted by limpidity and gracefulness in Blackshaw's style expressed through pianism of enviable command, every note weighted and articulated with care. Echoes of Walter Gieseking's technique resound here but without the imperturbable facility he displayed in his recordings of Mozart's keyboard music 60 years ago. Blackshaw isn't imperturbable. It's easy to hear how committed he is to the music; but a reverential detachment inhibits engagement with the full expressive potential of every work.

Not though in the *Fantasie* K475 or the Sonata K457. Rowley appears to have had no knowledge of them. Blackshaw has knowledge; and it's deep, interpreting Mozart's bi-polar mood swings so prevalent in these works to be more depressive than manic. Eruptions aren't sharply profiled but are expressed within an ambiance closer to desolation than frenzy. Musicians like Kristian Bezuidenhout sense the extremes. Blackshaw plumbs an underlying haunting sorrow. It's another view; and a profound one. Strange, then, that he should distance himself from the subjective in other works. This fastidious musician so superfine in execution who in the greatest music on this disc scales heights to project content, now seems to prefer politely reasoned statements to close involvement. The purist in him offers in Variation 11 of the last movement of K284 Mozart's plainer

autograph score in contrast to the usually played decorated version published in the first edition; and does so with much feeling and sensitivity. There are similar instances of perception and illumination, eg a sense of drama in the first-movement developments of K332 and K545, but otherwise Blackshaw's performances of these three sonatas are dispassionately uninvolved. In their separate ways Alfred Brendel, Daniel-Ben Pienaar and Maria João Pires combine rhetoric with introspection to penetrate the richly mercurial spirit behind the notes. Blackshaw usually stands back. **Nalen Anthoni**

*Selected comparisons:*

Pienaar (2/11) (AVIE) AV2209

Pires (DG) 477 5200GB6

K475 – *selected comparison:*

Bezuidenhout (8/10) (HARM) HMU90 7497

K457 – *selected comparison:*

Bezuidenhout (2/11) (HARM) HMU90 7498

K332 & K457 – *selected comparison:*

Brendel (1/02) (PHIL) 468 048-2PH

## Rameau

Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de clavecin, Livre II

Alexander Paley *pf*

La Música © LMU003 (76' • DDD)



More and more pianists are turning to Rameau's keyboard works, including

Alexander Paley – this is the second disc in a projected complete cycle. By and large, the composer's decorative idiom withstands Paley's subjective style and protracted tempi, whether or not one agrees with all of his interpretive decisions. Throughout the Suite in E's Courante, for example, Paley's deliberation allows plenty of legroom for fustian ornaments, in contrast to Angela Hewitt's quicker overall pulse and stylistically apt *notes inégales* (Hyperion). Paley embellishes the first Gigue and Rondeau with rapid zither-like repeated notes which might sound ghastly on a harpsichord yet suit the modern concert grand to a T. By contrast, his lurching phrase distortions throw the rhythmic swagger off kilter in the first 'Rigaudon' and in 'Tambourin'.

If Paley slows down the chattering birdsongs of 'Le rappel des oiseaux' to zombie-like stasis, the similarly free-framed 'Menuet en rondeau' plus the Suite in D's 'Les Niais de Sologne', 'La Follette' and 'Les Soupirs' hypnotically float over the bar-lines with subtle accentuations and inflections. The pianist's emphatic stresses and dynamic hairpins work better in 'Les

Tourbillons' than they do in 'Les Cyclopes', where his upward repeated notes sound heavy and tired alongside Rameau piano pioneer Marcelle Meyer's effortlessly nimble fingers (Erato). Next to the deliciously turned trills and coiled lilt of Meyer's 'La Dauphine', Paley's relatively diffuse and sectionalised interpretation pales. Few of this pianist's discs capture his full-bodied and colourful tone to the degree of this fascinating but not consistently convincing release. **Jed Distler**

## Stäbler

'HEISS!'

!?. HEISS!. Windows. TAP. ABER...

Dominik Susteck *org*

Wergo © WER7315-2 (79' • DDD)



Gerhard Stäbler came to music through the organ and today remains earthed in

its history and base acoustic alchemy: an empirical sound source. Encountering Stäbler's !? – *Musikalischer Essay über die Grenzen des Möglichen* ('musical essay on the limits of the possible') in a blindfold test, you might seriously wonder what outlandish piece of electronic music kit could have possibly created such fatidical lunar landscape music. Or think, rather thrillingly, that this might not be music at all. Rattling window shutters in the breeze, percussive splashes riding the rapids, the ground juddering underneath – the opening moments are suggestive of taking a wide-angled view of a multilayered external environment, where sounds just loiter around.

This encouraging prospect falls under the control of Dominik Susteck, the Cologne-based organist who specialises in modernist organ music from Ligeti and Kagel onwards. !? (2001) reveals itself only slowly, reluctantly even. Tonal debris and familiar organ timbres bob into view but Stäbler's obsessively dislocated structure – dislocated despite some recurring, punctuating modules of sound – reaches peak weird by resisting any temptation to order these strange sonic objects into neat paragraphs. Similarly, *HEISS!* (1988) plays in the cracks: a sequence of narrowband clusters, notated graphically in the manner of a supermarket barcode, overlap then check out.

ABER... (2009) is laid out more conventionally, allusions to Baroque and Classical tradition etched into the textures and pushed to extremes: pitches waver; the whole construction feels perched on the

point of disintegration. Thrilling. *Windows* (1983) and *TAP* (1998), for the pedals alone, are more conceptual, and throughout the disc you're keenly aware of Susteck's intense engagement with this music. 'HEISS!' has been cannily adapted for his organ of choice in Cologne, each sound carefully measured and tailored to fit the whole. **Philip Clark**

## Anatole Kitain

'The Complete Columbia Recordings, 1936-39'

Works by **Brahms, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov/Strimer, Schumann, Scriabin** and **R Strauss/Godowsky**

Anatole Kitain *pf*

APR © ② APR6017 (123' • ADD)

From APR7029 (4/96, 8/96)



What factors determine your admission into the pantheon of great

artists? Talent, of course, but also luck – or the lack of it – must play a part. How else could Anatole Kitain (1903-80) have been so completely forgotten? APR first issued this collection nearly 20 years ago, yet Kitain's status has remained exactly the same as it was: nowhere. Now repackaged in the label's smart standard livery, Bryan Crimp's exemplary transfers present a compelling portrait of a player who, while detached and emotionally cool (the heights of passion elude him), is among the most glittering, elegant pianists on disc.

Look no further than the first item, Chopin's Rondo in E flat (its earliest recording and, for me, still the finest), tossed off with suave panache and, like all these discs, bathed in a warm, pearly tone that enchants the ear. This is followed by the minor masterpiece that is the Mazurka in A minor, Op 17 No 4, in which Kitain allows its baleful tale to unfold without any added self-indulgent sentimentality. The rest of the Chopin selection has many passing felicities – the gracefully graded return to the main subject of the Scherzo No 1, for example, the veiled left hand in the E flat minor Etude (doubtless not to everyone's taste) and the fabulous articulation in the *Revolutionary* Etude.

Kitain offers a very different perspective on 'Vallée d'Obermann' (another first recording?) to Horowitz's nerve-shredding ecstasy, one which many will find too glibly matter-of-fact, hardly the case in the two Petrarch Sonnets and the dazzling dispatch of 'Feux follets'. The Brahms Ballade and Op 39 Waltzes would not on their own be reasons for investing in this set, nor

Schumann's Toccata, though Kitain sends it spinning on its tedious way with more musicality than Barere could muster. What clinches it for me is the fabulous account of Godowsky's potpourri on themes from *Die Fledermaus*, in which Kitain's phenomenal technique, aristocratic poise and lucid handling of the contrapuntal textures (mischievously witty as surely intended) are in a class attained by only a chosen few.

Jeremy Nicholas

## 'Hymnus'

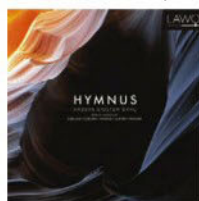
**Alfvén** Präludium, Op 31 **Carlsen** Prélude and Intermezzo. Festforspil (Festival Prelude)

**Nielsen** Commotio, Op 58 **Sibelius** Intrada, Op 111a. Surusoitto (Funeral Music), Op 111b **Sinding** Hymnus, Op 124

**Anders Eidsten Dahl** org

LAWO Classics © LWC1050 (74' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Bragernes Church, Drammen, Norway



In its concise but slow-feeling harmonic journey, Sibelius's *Intrada* (1925) sounds

almost like a Schenkerian harmonic plotting of a larger, more colourful orchestral score. It followed the Seventh Symphony and there's a clear motivic parallel (the gesture immediately preceding the symphony's trombone solo). *Surusoitto* (1931) was written for Akseli Gallen's funeral and to my ears manages to capture a number of the painter's visual hallmarks, not least a certain shrieking drama isolated to a fleeting moment or background detail. Genuinely fascinating in a year like this, but there's no getting round the fact that Sibelius's union with the organ was a more funereal than matrimonial one.

Nielsen's relationship with the instrument was more significant. He was immensely proud of *Commotio* (also 1931), the crowning glory of his late turn to polyphony. In a sense, it's his most impressive creation – 23 minutes (under Anders Eidsten Dahl's fingers and feet) and astonishing in its melding of Nielsen's angular shapes to such intense counterpoint (three Danish composers have orchestrated it). I have a soft spot for Keith John's terrifyingly gothic new recording from Gloucester Cathedral (Willowhayne Recordings) but that has to be filed under 'guilty pleasure' when you consider Nielsen's polyphonic project. From Dahl, it all sounds a bit head-over-heart, which was precisely Nielsen's point.

Elsewhere, the compact 1998 Carsten Lund instrument at Bragernes Church can

feel limited. Dahl finds some nice French sounds in Sinding's *Hymnus* but the composer's structural preoccupations come at the expense of the freshening melodies he delivered elsewhere. Well-known Oslo cabaret artist Carsten Carlsen's organ works are of passing interest too. But Hugo Alfvén's little *Präludium* (1913) is a delight – proper chorale-based organ music in the tradition of Reger, which prompts some of Dahl's most nuanced playing.

Andrew Mellor

## 'Light and Shadows'

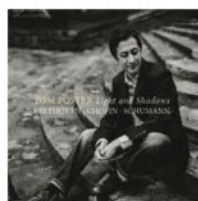
**Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 15, 'Pastoral', Op 28 **Chopin** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35

**Janáček** Christ the Lord is born

**Schumann** Waldszenen, Op 82

**Tom Poster** pf

Edition © EDNI060 (73' • DDD)



Entitled 'Light and Shadows', Tom Poster's thoughtful recital is arguably

more shadows than light. As his own accompanying note explains, the funereal tread of the *Andante* from Beethoven's *Pastoral* Sonata is 'melancholic' in contrast to the 'tragic' tread of Chopin's Funeral March. Yet if this most elusive of Beethoven sonatas is outwardly amiable, drama and volatility are never far below the surface. Poster takes a *moderato* view of the opening *Allegro* and compared to, say, Kempff's magical insouciance, is 'almost too serious', lacking that artist's inimitable chiaroscuro, his play of light and shade. In the finale (which Liszt remembered in the 'Pastorale' from his 'Swiss' *Année de pèlerinage*) he is again overly restrained, though suitably breaks out into the light in the whirl-away finish.

Again, in Schumann's *Waldszenen*, when compared to Richter or Pires, Poster is inward at the expense of a greater intensity and a more natural flow. His 'Prophet Bird' is suitably quizzical but, more generally, his pensive view can at times seem ponderous. In Chopin's Second Sonata, the *Scherzo* (a Mephisto-scherzo is ever there was one) is tame; and although I welcomed the lack of an always controversial first-movement repeat in one of Chopin's tautest arguments, Poster again allows the temperature to drop, making for cruel if necessary comparisons with grander, more fiery and committed readings by the likes of Cortot, Gilels and Argerich, to name but three. Poster rounds off his programme with Janáček's fragment, *Christ the Lord is born*, music admirably suited to his

introspective style. Edition Classics' sound is satisfactory rather than vivid or outstanding. **Bryce Morrison**

## 'Rrevolution'

**Beffa** Suite **Stockhausen** Klavierstücke I-V, VII-IX **Stravinsky** Three Movements from *Petrushka*

**Vanessa Benelli Mosell** pf

Decca © 481 1616 (58' • DDD)



On paper, Vanessa Benelli Mosell's 'revolution/evolution' concept seems

provocative enough to draw attention. In reality, the thorny, intricate serial landscapes of Stockhausen's shorter *Klavierstücke* relate to Stravinsky's accordion-like piano-writing in the *Three Movements from Petrushka* like oil to water. Mosell studied the Stockhausen pieces with the composer, and his spirit must be smiling upon the pianist's utmost precision in regard to dynamic scaling and rhythm. Yes, you'll infer additional surface elegance from Stockhausen cycles by Bernard Wambach or Aloys Kontarsky, yet the cutting edge of Mosell's loud, detached notes hits home.

In *Petrushka*'s 'Danse russe', Mosell's nimble yet hectic fingerwork lacks the dynamic range, rhythmic control and textural characterisation of either Maurizio Pollini or Yuja Wang. The same goes for the melodic leaps and busy double notes in 'Chez Pétrouchka'. Mosell fares much better in 'La semaine grasse', as she navigates the treacherous chordal jumps, arpeggio showers and pinpoint *glissandos* with effortless poise. However, she sacrifices both tonal heft and cumulative drama for speed. As a consequence, her interpretation sounds relatively small-scale when compared with Pollini's layered detailing or the joyful orchestral sonorities that Arthur Rubinstein conjures up in his imperfect yet thrilling live Carnegie Hall performance.

A skilfully wrought (if somewhat derivative) suite by the contemporary French composer/pianist Karol Beffa bridges the Stockhausen and Stravinsky. His arpeggio-driven piano-writing resembles a mélange of late Debussy and middle-period Scriabin in the first two movements, while the third movement's manic rag might be described as Schulhoff minus the tunes. Instead of the usual PR puffery that accompanies releases by new piano stars in the making, Decca provides excellent annotations that discuss the music seriously. **Jed Distler**



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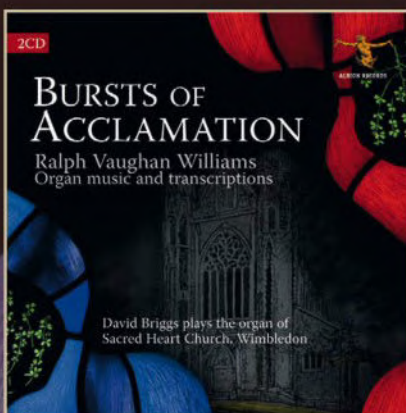


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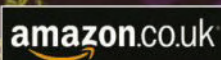
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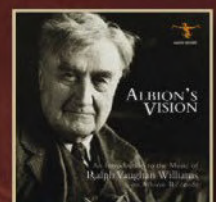
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# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## YOUNG PIANISTS

**Bryce Morrison** listens to a handful of young artists making their recorded debuts in music ranging from Bach to Rachmaninov



Sodi Braide brings 'unforced eloquence and integrity' to Schubert on his new disc

Here on five CDs are examples of rising stars, a young generation prompting several token observations. The overall standard is too high to think competitively and yet I have to say that pride of place goes to **Sodi Braide**, Paris-trained but of Nigerian background. Schubert has become his ultimate joy, a magically evolving presence in his life, reflected in performances of such familiar fare as the D899 Impromptus and the B flat Sonata, D960. Here, without recourse to idiosyncrasy or preening mannerism, everything is made movingly unfamiliar, and this is particularly true of what I have called the 'Hamlet' of sonatas, music of subtle and infinite musical demands. Braide's strong but unforced eloquence and integrity exceed the playing of many other celebrated ('celebrity') names. Always he allows Schubert his own unimpeded voice. The performances of the Impromptus are of similar calibre. Braide was born to play Schubert and, I suspect, much else besides.

Now we turn to Chopin's 27 Etudes, that cruelly exposed Parnassus of the repertoire. In **Irina Bogdanova** you hear a pianist of daunting proficiency, able to play all the notes impressively (no mean feat in such demanding fare). But crossing the Rubicon from pragmatism to poetry is always an elusive challenge and what I missed was an acute, less generalised response, particularly in the slow études

where the test becomes more richly varied and less exclusive than elsewhere. I doubt whether Chopin would have cried out, 'Ah, mon patrie!' after hearing Bogdanova in Op 10 No 3. You may be happy to miss, for example, the circus element that mars Cziffra's scorching bravura accounts; but on the other hand too little 'takes wing' (Philippe Entremont on Cortot). More positively, Bogdanova is at her most poised in the *Trois Nouvelles Etudes*, though even here her way with the A flat study (placed third) would hardly have prompted Liszt to be lost in wonder at Chopin's ineffable poetry.

Then there is **Audrey Vigoureux** in Bach and Beethoven who, according to the booklet-note, shows 'a solar interiority, a refined violence, an implacable and supple drive; an earthly mysticism, a fleshy limpidity; raging crystal'. More intelligibly, her playing is brisk and cool-headed. Fleet and dexterous, she suggests 'time's winged chariot hurrying near' (I imagine Martha Argerich is among her favourites), but the rapidity of her responses means that in both Beethoven's Op 27 No 1 and Op 110 sonatas she fails to generate sufficient stature or intensity. Nonetheless, her unfaltering assurance is highly impressive and extends to two Bach Fantasias and Fugues, where she realises their startling modernity through understatement rather than overemphasis.

**Alexander Schimpf**, who has received 'stimuli from Cécile Ousset and Janina

Fialkowska', is memorably attuned to the bittersweet melancholy of late Brahms (Op 119) and, sensing a foretaste of Debussy's Impressionism and most intimate confidences, continues with a selection from *Images*, Book 2. Here he evokes a world where natural phenomena are endowed with mystery and enigma, their 'inscape' (Gerard Manley Hopkins) creating a poetry that is 'golden' rather than 'brazen' (Philip Sidney). There is a timeless sense in 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' of bells tolling from All Saints' to All Souls' Day, and this is followed by a no less memorable *L'isle joyeuse* celebrating Debussy's new-found happiness with his second wife Emma Bardac on the island of Jersey. Beethoven's Op 111 Sonata represents more than a sea change but here, in the first movement, Schimpf's fleetness becomes a soft-focus alternative to a more elemental outpouring. The Arietta, however, is given with an unclouded musical grace.

Finally, **Olga Georgievskaya**, who opens and closes with two chaconnes, the first by Bach-Busoni, the second Vitali's in G minor (originally for violin and continuo, and heard here in Georgievskaya's own arrangement). In between come Rachmaninov's Second Sonata (played, sadly, in the now fashionable truncated 1931 rather than the original 1913 version) and two more settings by the pianist of Rachmaninov songs. The performances are of an all-Russian grandeur, with a sumptuous tonal resource ranging from a whispering *pianissimo* to the grandest *fortissimo*, a reminder that pianists who play without the fullest emotional commitment cut little ice in Russia. Georgievskaya ends in a blaze of glory that could only produce a storm of applause in her native land. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Schubert** Impromptus, D899, Pf Son No 21, D960 **Sodi Braide**  
Solstice (P) SOCD309



**Chopin** Etudes. Trois Nouvelles Etudes  
**Irina Bogdanova**  
Quartz (P) QTZ2109



**JS Bach. Beethoven** Piano Works  
**Audrey Vigoureux**  
Evidence (P) EVCD010



**Beethoven. Brahms. Debussy**  
Piano Works **Alexander Schimpf**  
Oehms (P) OC1820



**Bach. Rachmaninov. Vitali** Chaconnes & Songs **Olga Georgievskaya**  
Odradek (P) ODRCD318

# Unsub Chin

The Korean-born, Germany-based composer was inspired by Ligeti yet has gone on to find her own distinctive voice, writes Gavin Dixon

Curiouser and curiouser. Listening to the music of Unsub Chin can feel like an adventure in Alice's Wonderland. We start in familiar territory, with simple and attractive musical ideas, but these gradually weave into complex and unsettling textures. Soon we are down the rabbit hole, and nothing is quite what it seems. The music appears stable, until a subtle change in harmony casts it in an entirely new light. Perspectives change, motifs and melodies twist and distort. Simplicity gives way to beguiling complexity. Then everything stops, often with a thump from the percussion, and we are left contemplating the bizarre turn of events. Was it all a dream?

Unsub Chin has been fascinated by *Alice in Wonderland* since childhood, and it has inspired much of her music, most notably her 2007 *Alice* opera. But her take on the story is distinctive. The opera is full of moments of intrigue and wonder, but these are set against stark representations of the tale's brutal absurdity – a fantastical yet always lucid conception, typical of Chin. As a Korean based in Germany, she has an outsider's perspective on European culture, and her music regularly highlights its ingrained paradoxes. She is a voice of reason, bringing order to the surreal. Above all, she

*'I wanted Alice to be a highly intellectual opera but also one that is simple and can communicate with the audience' – Unsub Chin*

brings clarity, however complex her music becomes, with every note remaining audible, every motivation clear.

Such clarity is rare in new music, and it sets Chin apart. It stems from her interest in musical depictions of colour and light. Her orchestral work *Rocaná*, for example, has a Sanskrit title that translates as 'room of light', and the instrumental textures follow 'the behaviour of beams of light – their distortion, refraction, reflections and undulations'. This conception of sound grew out of Chin's work with electronics; from 1988 she spent two years working in the electronic music studio of Berlin Technical University. She credits the experience with changing her approach to composition, moving away from notions of theme and development towards a more abstract 'fantasy of sound colours'.

Clarity requires perfection, and Unsub Chin is a perfectionist. Many of her early works have been withdrawn, and later ones subjected to extensive revision. Her Cello Concerto, for Alban Gerhardt, was acclaimed at its 2009 Proms premiere, but the composer was dissatisfied with the second movement. When the piece re-emerged in 2013, the harmonic structure of the movement had been completely revised – the textures and sounds little changed, but the movement's trajectory radically transformed and refined.



Eternal perfectionist: Unsub Chin has revised or withdrawn many of her works

The concerto genre has proved an ideal format for Chin's work. As well as those for sheng (the traditional Chinese mouth organ) and cello, she has also written concertos for piano, violin and clarinet, and a double concerto for piano and percussion. She rarely sets the soloist against the ensemble, preferring instead to explore the textures and sounds they can create together. Not that the results ever lack drama or tension – there is as much tumult in Chin's music as there is tranquillity, and soloists are regularly pushed to their limits. 'I like to see soloists go beyond their possibilities to create an extreme situation,' she explains.

In this partnership of soloist and orchestra, the soloist becomes the music's voice, the point of focus to lead the ear through the complexity. Chin is not afraid to write a tune, which we often hear in the solo line singing across the orchestral textures. In the Cello Concerto, the soloist often moves around the fingerboard in graceful *portamento* glides, an effect so lyrical it naturally evokes the human voice.

Singing is never far from the surface of Chin's music. As she says, 'I'm Korean – Koreans enjoy singing.' She has a particular fondness for the soprano voice, for which she has been writing throughout her career. *Acrostic-Wordplay*, her



## UNSUUK CHIN FACTS

**Born** Seoul, South Korea,  
July 14, 1961

**Breakthrough work**  
*Acrostic-Wordplay*  
(1991, rev 1993)

**Definitive work**  
*Alice in Wonderland* (2007)

**Awards** 2004 Grawemeyer  
Award for Violin Concerto; 2005  
Arnold Schoenberg Prize; 2010  
Prince Pierre Foundation Music  
Composition Prize for *Gougālōn*

**Unsuuk Chin on her music**

'My music is a reflection of my dreams. I try to render into music the visions of immense light and of an incredible magnificence of colours that I see in all my dreams, a play of light and colours floating through the room and at the same time forming a fluid sound sculpture. Its beauty is very abstract and remote, but it is for these very qualities that it addresses the emotions and can communicate joy and warmth.' (2003)

first soprano song-cycle, established Chin as a leading player in European contemporary music. The work was performed, still incomplete, by the Nieuw Ensemble in Amsterdam in 1991. The composer George Benjamin was in the audience, and was so impressed that he immediately began planning a London

performance. That took place in 1993 at the QEH – the premiere of the completed work. Another success, this time at a higher profile – and so began Chin's international career.

*Acrostic-Wordplay* dates from just after Chin completed her studies and the influence of her teacher György Ligeti is clear. The older composer was a connoisseur of the surreal, especially of nonsense rhymes and riddles. In *Acrostic-Wordplay*, we hear a similar imagination at work, Chin continually finding inspiration in word games, drawing as much from the sounds of the texts as the fleeting associations they evoke.

Similarities abound between teacher and pupil, with Chin's music often continuing and extending Ligeti's idea. With her Piano Etudes, Chin seemed to take up where Ligeti left off. Like Ligeti's, Chin's are an occasional series, now six in number (of an envisioned 12), and each is characterised by a Ligeti-like interplay of order and chaos. A distinctive musical idea gives each étude a clear identity, but this is quickly subsumed into complex webs of sound. But the differences are instructive. However involved Chin's textures become, her sense of clarity, that feeling of light and openness, always ensures transparency. And where Ligeti tends towards the mechanistic, Chin always maintains a sense of the lyrical – her music always sings.

There's no mistaking the humour in her music though, the fundamental link between late Ligeti and early Chin. Ligeti's humour is more morose, and Chin's more puckish, but both have a sense of playfulness that imbues their work with buoyancy and endearing charm. Chin often takes inspiration from comical sources, such as her early memories of slapstick Korean street theatre in *Gougālōn*, or European pantomime traditions in *cosmigimmicks*.

*Alice in Wonderland* was another fascination shared by Ligeti and Chin. Ligeti long fostered an ambition to write an opera on the subject. Chin took up the idea, and her opera was premiered in Munich in 2007 under the baton of her most ardent champion, Kent Nagano. She treated the project as an opportunity to bring together every aspect of her music to date, from her absurdist humour, to her virtuosic soprano writing of the title-role, to her complex yet transparent orchestral textures. 'I wanted to write an opera that is highly intellectual but that is also very simple and can communicate directly with the audience,' Chin later explained – a paradoxical mix but a successful one. The opera has now had five separate productions around the world and remains her most popular work.

Now in her mid-50s, Unsuuk Chin is at the height of her creative powers. Recent compositions include her Clarinet Concerto for the Finnish virtuoso Kari Kriikku, and *Mannequin*, written for the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, which gave the premiere earlier this year in Gateshead. That work is inspired by dance, and the composer has suggested that it may lead on to music for choreography, which would be a new departure for her. But Chin's next major project is a return to a familiar theme, an opera based on *Through the Looking Glass*. It is a Royal Opera commission and is due to open in London in the 2018/19 season. Alice's adventures continue... **G**

## THE ESSENCE OF UNSUUK CHIN ON DISC

A snapshot of her orchestral, operatic and electronic music

**Cello Concerto. Piano Concerto. Šu**

Alban Gerhardt vc Sunwook Kim pf Wu Wei sheng  
Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra / Myung-Whun Chung  
DG ④ 481 0971GH (11/14)

Three concertos, each with a distinctive personality and colour. The recording also documents the partnership between Chin and the Seoul Philharmonic, where she has been Composer-in-Residence since 2006.

**Alice in Wonderland**

Sols; Bavarian State Opera / Kent Nagano  
EuroArts ④ 207 2414

Directed by Bertolt Brecht protégé Achim Freyer, the staging is as beguiling and surreal as the music. A strong cast, led in the title-role by Sally Matthews.

**Acrostic-Wordplay. Xi, etc**

Piia Komsa sop Ensemble InterContemporain  
Kairos ④ KAI0013062

A selection of Chin's earlier music for chamber orchestra in exemplary performances from Ensemble InterContemporain. They include her breakthrough work *Acrostic-Wordplay* and the electroacoustic *Xi*, which showcases Chin's imaginative and colourful use of electronics.

# Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan reviews works by three Praetoriuses on Archiv:  
*'Like a black-and-white film with colour artificially added later, this repertoire achieves a certain new intensity'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



Richard Wigmore on a disc of Tomášek songs from Hyperion:  
*'Combining warmth and fullness of tone with the requisite grace of style, Renata Pokupić is a persuasive advocate'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**

## J Bach • J Christoph Bach • JM Bach

**J Bach** Sei nun wieder zufrieden meine Seele.  
Unser Leben ist ein Schatten. Weint nicht um  
meinen Tod **J Christoph Bach** Es ist nun aus.  
Fürchte dich nicht. Der Gerechte, ob er gleich zu  
zeitlich stirbt. Herr, nun lässt du dein Diener in  
Friede fahren. Lieber Herr Gott, wecke auf uns.  
Der Mensch, vom Weibe geboren. Ich lasse dich  
nicht (attrib JS Bach). Merk auf, mein Herz. Mit  
Weinen hebt sichs an. Sei getreu bis in den Tod.  
Unsers Herzens Freude hat ein Ende **JM Bach**  
Das Blut Jesu Christi. Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe.  
Fürchtet euch nicht. Halt, was du hast. Herr, du  
lässt mich erfahren. Herr, ich warte auf dein  
Heil. Herr, wenn ich nur dich habe. Ich weiss  
dass mein Erlöser lebt. Dem Menschen ist  
gesetzt, einmal zu sterben. Nun hab ich  
überwunden. Nun treten wir ins neue Jahr.  
Sei, lieber Tag, willkommen. Unser Leben  
währet siebenzig Jahr

**Vox Luminis; Scorpio Collectief / Lionel Meunier**  
Ricercar ② RIC347 (141' • DDD • T/t)



The mystique of the  
'Vor Bach' generations  
has intensified in the  
last 30 years, from the

early recorded forays of Musica Antiqua  
Köln and others towards a greater  
refinement of the importance of Johann  
Sebastian's family to his emerging  
development and identity. Recent  
manuscript discoveries would also suggest  
that early Bachs were performed into the  
early 19th century, not least by the  
Singakademie Berlin.

The three characters celebrated in this  
deeply felt and atmospheric compendium  
of the complete Bach family motets  
before JSB are Johann Bach and the two  
brothers Johann Christoph and Johann  
Michael, respectively the composer's great  
uncle and first-cousin-once-removed  
(Michael was also Bach's father-in-law).  
The former represents the earliest  
surviving music by a Bach, characterised  
by a blend of strophic hymnody of  
devotional Lutheran soulfulness peppered

with cautious Italian conceits and fairly  
austere antiphony.

It's the music of Johann Christoph that  
truly captures the imagination. Even if  
Johann Sebastian had died in a plague, this  
JCB – described in Bach's Obituary as 'as  
good at inventing beautiful thoughts as he  
was at expressing words' – would still have  
taken his place as an exceptional figure in  
the crevice between Schütz and Buxtehude.  
Vox Luminis relish in *Der Gerechte* the  
richness of textual illustration and the  
arches of elegant scoring: a simultaneous  
delight in the forensic and abstract delights  
of five-part motet-writing in which the  
devices of Bach's own motets spring from  
the page. Just listen to the doleful imitative  
sequences of *Fürchte dich mich!*

Strong harmonic flavours abound too in  
the thoughtful if more conventional works  
of Johann Michael. On initial acquaintance,  
he may exhibit less of the fluency and  
expressive range of his elder brother but  
the sureness of sentiment in *Ich weiss dass  
mein Erlöser lebt* ('I know that my Redeemer  
liveth'), the directional vigour and  
polychoral majesty of the eight-part  
motets, and the chewy textures of *Das Blut  
Jesu Christi*, with the outstanding cornets  
and sackbuts of Scorpio Collectief, reveal  
another master of his genre.

Vox Luminis gravitate easily to the  
contemplative, never over-projecting the  
dramatic implications of the texts, although  
for those who prefer the more overt  
gestures of the Monteverdi Choir, these  
performances can appear prosaic and  
vocally inconsistent, especially in the  
occasional 'longueurs' where homophony  
outstays its welcome and where flatness  
in the upper line can dull the musical line  
(as in *Mit Weinen*). Even so, this varied  
repository of motets contains many small  
wonders, reinforcing our growing sense  
that Johann Sebastian had a mentor-in-  
chief in Johann Christoph, whose influence  
is incalculable. *Es ist nun aus* – a deeply  
touching devotional aria with each verse  
ending with 'Welt, gute nacht' – is worth  
the price of the discs alone.

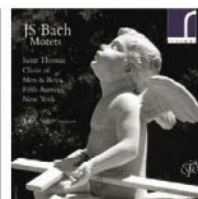
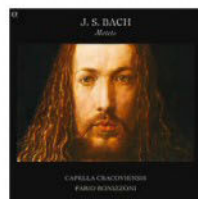
**Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

## JS Bach

Six Motets, BWV225-230.  
Ich lasse dich nicht, BWV Anh159  
**Capella Cracoviensis / Fabio Bonizzoni**  
Alpha ⑥ ALPHA199 (66' • DDD • T/t)

## JS Bach

Six Motets, BWV225-230.  
Ich lasse dich nicht, BWV Anh159  
**Saint Thomas Choir of Men & Boys, Fifth Avenue,  
New York / John Scott**  
Resonus ⑥ RES10152 (69' • DDD • T/t)



The discography of Bach's motets is as  
extensive and diverse as that devoted to any  
iconic set of Baroque choral masterpieces. It  
has been many years since it seemed viable  
to take sides about whether chamber choirs  
(with adult female singers on the top line),  
church or college choirs (with boy trebles)  
or slimline minimal approaches are 'right' or  
'wrong'. Capella Cracoviensis, under guest  
director Fabio Bonizzoni, deploy eight  
single voices. Leanly balanced contrapuntal  
textures and crisp diction abound, and there  
is an astute sense of light and shade. The  
fugue at the core of *Der Geist hilft* has  
articulate vigour, and the rhythms of the  
opening declamations to sing praises in  
*Singet dem Herrn* are lightly sprung. The  
weighted phrasing and flexible ebb and flow  
of pulse in *Jesu, meine Freude* make for a  
compellingly urgent argument but one that  
does not always conclude with completely  
satisfying answers (for instance, the running  
bass voice part and swaying upper voices in  
'So aber Christus' lack compassionate  
mysticism – although it is achieved sweetly  
in 'Gute Nacht, o Wesen'). The ensemble's  
voices often have a firm vibrato that colours  
the music warmly, but the lushness of  
texture in places such as the antiphonal  
exchanges in *Komm, Jesu, komm* (taken fairly  
briskly by Bonizzoni) also wobble with some  
flawed tuning.



Vox Luminis: unearthing the motets of Bach's forebears and family mentors on their new disc for Riccar

The Choir of St Thomas's, New York fields nearly 50 singers. Half of these are boy trebles, so the top line is always sustained smoothly; the lower-voice parts tend to be subservient, providing support rather than achieving absolute polyphonic equality. Soloists are used expediently for the florid passages in juxtaposition to full chorale phrases during the middle movement of *Singet dem Herrn*. John Scott's measured pacing yields harmonic clarity during the alternating double-choir sections in *Komm, Jesu, komm*, the choir juxtaposes clarity in florid passages with cathartic cadential resolutions in *Der Geist hilft*, and the dynamic range between whispered fugue and grand homophonic conclusion in *Fürchte dich nicht* is enthralling, albeit perhaps a mite contrived. The continuo trio of cello, double bass and organ inevitably has a more distant share of the textural pie than the prevalence of the instruments on the bass-line in the chamber-scale Polish recording. Each survey includes *Ich lasse dich nicht*, for many years misattributed to Bach's father's cousin Johann Christoph; the crystal-clear spatial distinction between the two choirs in the New York recording yields a gently profound effect, whereas Capella Cracoviensis' double quartet of singers sound more homogenised and are placed at the foreground. **David Vickers**

## Barber • Bernstein • Copland • Thompson

**Barber** *Agnus Dei. Reincarnations*, Op 6.

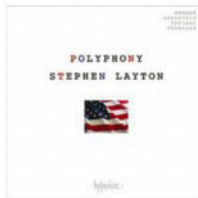
Two Choruses, Op 8. Two Pieces, Op 42.

A nun takes the veil, 'Heaven-haven', Op 13 No 1

**Bernstein** *Missa brevis* **Copland** Four Motets

**Thompson** *Alleluia. Fare Well*

**Polyphony** / **Stephen Layton** with **Robert Millett** *perc*  
Hyperion © CDA67929 (74' • DDD • T/t)



This is an atmospheric anthology, fastidiously chosen and delivered by this fine choir. The

Barber *Agnus Dei*, the vocal version of the famous Adagio, is the best-known piece and makes its customary impact, although this performance trumps most others. The slow pace is impressively sustained and there is a telling bass-line commanding a real low D. Then Layton explores Barber's unaccompanied choral pieces with equal sympathy. 'Twelfth night' catches the mystical intensity of Laurie Lee's nativity poem and Barber also admired the Irish folk qualities of James Stephens in *Reincarnations*. The choral pacing and phrasing in pieces such as 'A nun takes the veil' is impeccable.

The Copland Motets are uncharacteristic student pieces in a conservative style. They

were written for his teacher, Nadia Boulanger, when he was probably not yet 21. As it happens, they are close to the idiom of the Barber songs represented here and well worth their 1979 publication, especially in performances like these. Randall Thompson's *Alleluia* was a best-selling choral piece from its publication in 1940 right through the 1960s. It may now seem slightly tame, but Thompson caught the mood of Walter de la Mare's famous poem 'Fare Well' to perfection.

The oddity here is the Bernstein *Missa brevis*. It was put together from recycled material – and it shows – but it does offer an insight into unfamiliar Bernstein with echoes of before and after. Parts of it uses tubular bells; there's a smattering of drums; and there are some attractive solos, beautifully sung by countertenor David Allsopp.

**Peter Dickinson**

## Beethoven

*Missa solemnis*, Op 123

**Genia Kühmeier** *sop* **Elisabeth Kulman** *mez* **Mark**

**Padmore** *ten* **Hanno Müller-Brachmann** *bass-bar*

**Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra**  
/ **Bernard Haitink**

BR-Klassik © 900130 (79' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulessaal, Munich,  
September 25-26, 2014



This is Bernard Haitink's first recording of Beethoven's *Missa*

*solemnis*, a remarkable fact in itself which becomes doubly so when one realises that Haitink was 85 when he directed the performances from which the recording derives. They took place in Munich last autumn. Haitink could not have chosen a better place to stage them. The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra is currently as fine a Beethoven ensemble as any in Germany and Peter Dijkstra's Bavarian Radio Choir marries weight with refinement in exactly the right measure.

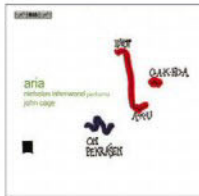
As befits a musician of his age and experience, Haitink sees the work whole. He holds the Mass's dramatic and meditative elements in a near ideal accord and projects them unerringly in a single 80-minute span. It is interesting, however, that at no point is one remotely aware that the performance is being conducted. It simply is. Take the opening of the *Credo*. Given a perfectly judged *Allegro ma non troppo* and a rock-steady pulse, the music appears to circle on itself with all the inevitability of a planet circling its sun. This is a wonderful account of the movement, not least in the deep sense of indwelling which the orchestra and Haitink's superb quartet of soloists led by Mark Padmore bring to the 'Crucifixus'. After that, there is no looking back. The meditative passages of the *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei* are similarly fine, with the *Agnus Dei* itself bringing the great work powerfully yet calmly to its appointed end.

The recording is of studio quality. Had this been a studio recording I suspect the producer might have been tempted to revisit the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, if only to pick up on the special mood which the performance generates from the *Credo* onwards.

But that is a small quibble. There are plenty of recordings of the *Missa solemnis* that are essentially theatrical happenings regulated from without. This is a spiritual event which grows from within. Free of any taint of ego, it takes with unerring aim the course the composer himself prescribed when he wrote the words 'from the heart to the heart'. **Richard Osborne**

## Cage

Aria with Fontana Mix. A Chant with Claps. Sonnekus<sup>2</sup>. Eight Whiskus. A Flower. The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs. Nowth Upon Nacht. Experiences No 2. Ryoanji  
**Nicholas Isherwood** *bass-bar*  
BIS (F) BIS2149 (45' • DDD/DSD)



In her magnificent recent biography of Charlotte Moorman – the New York cellist

who moulded modern composition towards sexualised performance art, nudity coming as standard – Joan Rothfuss describes how the only feeling the cellist ever aroused in John Cage was one of disdain. Moorman was 'performing' Cage's music too self-consciously; sound had become subservient to the performance act remade as spectacle.

And here you'll notice that the bass-baritone Nicholas Isherwood is billed as 'performing' rather than 'singing' Cage. Isherwood's reverberant voice, rich like steamed lobster flesh, lends a wholly unexpected flavour to early-period Cage songs: existing performances of 'The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs' (1942) and 'A Flower' (1950) from Joëlle Léandre, Joan La Barbara and Arline Carmen (with Cage on piano) have no point of connection with operatic pomp.

But if you suspect this disc is about to suffer a critical drubbing on the grounds of stylistic impurity, fear not: Isherwood is far too wise and sensitive to misrepresent Cage. His new disc is an eloquent and persuasive contribution to the Cageian cause precisely because he approaches the music from an alternative vantage point, and Cage's material proves itself robust enough to cope.

And thrive too. Isherwood's realisation of *Ryoanji*, Cage's mid-'80s self-assembly score for voice and variable ensemble, purées the instrumental accompaniment down to fingers divining pure-toned pitches from the rim of a water-filled crystal wine glass. A glorious three-part invention ensues: the resonant harmonics of the wine glass cut through real-time Isherwood dubbed over his own pre-recorded voice, the overlapping lines at times smudging towards randomised sonic smog. Cage would surely have approved.

Isherwood's vocal acrobatics take us far deeper inside melodic nuance than any other performance; tiptoeing gradations of microtonal pitch, *glissandos* suspended mid-freefall, errant notes grabbed from nowhere made to find their context. The disc launches with a hybrid performance of the vocal *Aria* combined with the electronic *Fontana Mix* (both 1958), which Isherwood stages as vivid living theatre. 'Nowth Upon Nacht' (1984) represents Cage at his most expressionistic: a shriek of falsetto despair in memory of Cathy Berberian. **Philip Clark**

## Compère

Magnificat primi toni. Tant ay d'ennuy/O vos omnes. Dictes moy toutes voz pensées. Une plaisant fillette ung matin se leva. Vous me faites mourir d'envie. Ung franc archier. Ne doibt on prendre quant on donne. Au travail suis sans espoir de confort. Mes pensées ne me lessent une heure. O bone Jesu

**The Orlando Consort**

Hyperion (F) CDA68069 (68' • DDD • T/t)



For their second recording of the music of Loyset Compère

(their first was over twenty years ago – Metronome, 6/94), The Orlando Consort take the brave step of focusing almost exclusively on his songs. Brave, because 15th-century songs, with their use of wholesale repetition and uniformity of texture, require more patience of the uninitiated listener than much sacred music of the period, such that today's ensembles often hesitate to tackle them. This may be especially true of Compère, whose songs can last around 10 minutes in performance. They are also very exposing of a singer's technique: there really is nowhere to hide.

So much for the risks; now the rewards. Patience yields an appreciation of these pieces' near-miraculous formal balance and strength of melodic invention, both essential for the music to sustain the repetitions just mentioned. *Vous me faites mourir d'envie* and *Dictes moy toutes voz pensées* are exemplary in these regards: they embody a mellifluous high style of chanson (reminiscent of Busnois at his most lyrical), which sees The Orlandos at their best. A contrasting tone is set in *Une jeune fillette* and *Un franc archier*, respectively racy and bumptious. These show Compère anticipating the more trenchant style in four voices that was to dominate the early 16th century. One wonders whether The Orlandos could have made greater play of the satire here, but this would arguably have detracted from Compère's careful handling of sonority, which is wonderfully captured. The only real misjudgement concerns the singing of the text in the lower voice of *Tant ay d'ennuy*, which seems to me distracting and might better have been vocalised. The opening *Magnificat* is a little tentative in places and sounds recessed within the acoustic but the movingly simple *O bone Jesu* is very nicely done, whether or not Compère actually composed it. In any case, this project is a confident affirmation that all-vocal recordings of 15th-century songs are well worth making. **Fabrice Fitch**

## Denyer

Riverine Delusions<sup>a</sup>. Two Voices with Axe<sup>b</sup>.

Whispers<sup>c</sup>. A Woman Singing<sup>d</sup>. Woman with Jinashi Shakuhachi<sup>e</sup>

Frank Denyer<sup>bc</sup> voc/<sup>e</sup> insts<sup>bd</sup> Juliet Fraser<sup>voc</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Jos Zwaanenburg <sup>fl</sup> <sup>b</sup> Benjamin Gilmore <sup>vn</sup>

<sup>bc</sup> Elisabeth Smalt <sup>va</sup> <sup>b</sup> Dario Calderone <sup>db</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Pepe Garcia Rodriguez <sup>perc</sup> <sup>b</sup> Bob Gilmore <sup>axe</sup>

<sup>e</sup> Kiku Day <sup>shakuhachi/voc/perc</sup> <sup>b</sup> Jamie Man <sup>cond</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The Barton Workshop

Another Timbre © AT82 (66' • DDD)



Until reaching the climactic summit of *Riverine Delusions* – where bass drum

thwacks overpower the remainder of the ensemble – this album featuring recent work by the British composer Frank Denyer barely registers a *mezzo-piano*. The opening two pieces, *Whispers* and *Woman with Jinashi Shakuhachi*, both creep around a vocal twilight zone: music vanishing inside the shadows. Denyer's own voice carries *Whispers* (2010) as Elisabeth Smalt plays offstage muted violin – a conventional violin approach twice removed. What this music might be 'about', what it could symbolise or depict, remains largely a mystery. Denyer whimpers, splutters, semi-whistles. The attitude is anti-*bel canto*, his utterances encased by silence and by obsessive minuscule scrapings on ancillary percussion instruments. Occasional ripenings of melody can never quite bring the music in from the shadowy cold.

*Woman with Jinashi Shakuhachi* (2008) and *A Woman Singing* (2009) – two pieces from an ongoing series for solo female performer – push similar existentialist buttons. Juliet Fraser's performance of *A Woman Singing* circles around a base-palette of broken-up syllables, pinched *portamentos* and disembodied cries. In *Whispers*, Smalt's supple, lithe violin lines plead against Denyer's voice and there's a sense, if not of company exactly, then of two independent beings grappling to making sense of occupying the same space. But I felt as if I was eavesdropping on Fraser – bearing witness to an internal music escaping, like she can't help it. *Riverine Delusions* (2007) and *Two Voices with Axe* (2010) return to terrain broadly familiar from earlier Denyer releases. The violent upshot of *Riverine Delusions* has already been alluded to but *Two Voices with Axe*, which features Bob Gilmore chopping wood with an axe, a strikingly brutal and disruptive sound, takes matters further: a primeval sound slicing through the subtone, muffled colours produced by voices and ensemble. **Philip Clark**

## Kowalski

Acht Lieder nach Gedichte von Hafis.

Ein schöner Stern geht auf in meiner Nacht.

Der Frühling. Nachtgeräusche. Reifefreuden.

Pierrot lunaire. Ernste Stunde. Immer wieder.

Der Panther. Liebeslied

Wolfgang Holzmair <sup>bar</sup> Thérèse Lindquist <sup>pf</sup>

Bridge © BRIDGE9431 (61' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Munich Hochschule für Musik und Theater, November 4, 2011



A Frankfurt-based copyright lawyer and synagogue cantor, Max Kowalski (1882-1956)

was a part-time composer of songs – over 200 in all – some of which were popular in Germany until 1933, when his work was proscribed by the Nazis. Though he considered himself 'an arch Romantic', his career intersects with Schoenberg's. In 1913 Kowalski composed a setting for voice and piano of Giraud's *Pierrot lunaire*, usually called the *Pierrot Lieder* to distinguish it from Schoenberg's masterpiece, of which Kowalski was unaware. Schoenberg, however, subsequently became one of his legal clients, and the two corresponded after Kowalski was forced into exile following the closure of his law firm, the confiscation of his property and a brief internment in Buchenwald. He never returned to Germany and died in London, where he worked as a singing teacher. He continued composing to the last.

His work is currently undergoing reappraisal as a part of the continuing re-evaluation of 'Entartete Musik', and Wolfgang Holzmair undertook a recital of his songs in Munich in 2011, when this live recording was made. *Pierrot lunaire*, inevitably perhaps, is the centrepiece, though many, I suspect, will find the late (1946) Hafiz cycle the greater work, and be even more struck by the stark group of Rilke settings that brings the disc to a close. Wolf's influence is very apparent in *Pierrot*, where fleeting allusions to the Mignon's 'So lasst mich scheinen' mark Kowalski's hero out as heir to German traditions of Romantic melancholy. Elsewhere, the shifting major-minor tonalities and winding, elusive vocal lines bring him closer to Zemlinsky than anyone else. Holzmair sings it all with an immaculate style that admirably fuses sound and sense, though he sometimes finds *Pierrot*'s big vocal spans uncomfortably wide. Thérèse Lindquist tackles the accompaniments, some of them almost Lisztian in their complexity, with terrific aplomb. **Tim Ashley**

## Lassus

Missa super Dixit Joseph. Dixit Joseph undecim fratribus suis. Confitemini Domino. In me transierunt irae tuae. O mors, quam amara est memoria tua. Deus, qui sedes super thronum. Si bona suscepimus. Deus, canticum novum. Veni dilecte mi. Fallax gratia. Timor et tremor

Cinquecento

Hyperion © CDA68064 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Rather like their Hyperion stablemates The Brabant Ensemble,

Cinquecento make a speciality of championing lesser-known 16th-century composers. On this occasion, however, they tackle the most famous composer of his time: this is the second significant recording of Lassus's music, and the second of his impressive Mass *Dixit Joseph*, to appear in the last few months. The two versions are instructively contrasted: Odhecaton's approach was choral, with at least two voices to a part, while Cinquecento consist of soloists. Odhecaton's warmth and cohesion were very pleasing but Cinquecento's reading is the more finely detailed and vocally sure-footed, with a more secure sense of architecture. It's also useful to hear the work on which the Mass is based (Lassus's motet of the same name) immediately before, which Odhecaton didn't provide. It aids repeated listening, which is invaluable because Lassus's Masses often require more than one hearing to make their point. Close attention is rewarded with deepening appreciation; and, personal preference aside, my listening certainly gained in focus for hearing the two readings side by side.

The two programmes are complementary, the rest of Cinquecento's programme consisting of motets while Odhecaton offer a smorgasbord of genres. The opening *Confitemini Domino* is a superb piece, splendidly managed by the ensemble. The only possible criticism concerns the predominantly 'minor' modal cast of most of the motets, which limits the ensemble's expressive palette. A couple of livelier pieces wouldn't have gone amiss, and the concluding syncopations of *Timor et tremor*, memorable from The Tallis Scholars' fine anthology many years ago (Gimell, 7/89), might have been nimbler. I would suggest re-programming the running order of this very fine recording, or hearing the motets that follow the Mass separately. An even better solution would be another helping of Lassus. **Fabrice Fitch**  
*Missa super Dixit Joseph – selected comparison:*  
*Odhecaton (2/15) (MUSI) MEW1474*

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## Mahler • Schoenberg

**Mahler** Kindertotenlieder. Rückert-Lieder.

Des Knaben Wunderhorn – Das irdische Leben; Scheiden und Meiden; Aus! Aus!

**Schoenberg** Lieder, Op 2

Anne Schwanewilms *sop* Malcolm Martineau *pf*  
Onyx © ONYX4146 (67' • DDD • T/t)



This second Onyx disc from Anne Schwanewilms follows on from a recital of

songs by Liszt and Mahler (3/13) but sees the German soprano delving deeper into mezzo repertoire with the *Kindertotenlieder* and *Rückert-Lieder*. The results are mixed, and inevitably her voice – unusually ‘instrumental’ in quality, almost hollow-sounding in its glass-like clarity at the top, turning a little sour when pushed down below – brings a strangely wraith-like character to the *Kindertotenlieder*. As pure singing it’s often eccentric, and she sometimes swells and swoops unattractively. But the sound she makes also feels appropriate for the songs, each of which Schwanewilms, in her own booklet essay, describes as marking out five stages of grief from denial to acceptance. It translates into a performance of impressive cumulative power in which the soprano’s commitment and seriousness cannot be faulted; nor can the supreme sensitivity of Malcolm Martineau’s beautifully gauged accompaniment.

It will be up to readers, however, as to whether they are happy to accept Schwanewilms’s anaemic timbre instead of the richer voices of better-known mezzo alternatives (or mezzo-tinged sopranos). The same goes for the *Rückert-Lieder*. ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen’ is beautifully done, with moments of exquisite hush, but the lack of mid-range volume is noticeable in ‘Um Mitternacht’, where the tessitura just doesn’t sit right for this soprano. I was even less convinced, meanwhile, by the three *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* songs on the disc, for which Schwanewilms doesn’t seem to be either vocally or temperamentally suited, sounding stretched in some uncomfortable ‘Ade’s in ‘Scheiden und Meiden’. She’s a great deal more convincing in the early Schoenberg songs that open the programme, even if her big voice never feels entirely under control here either. The microphones struggle to catch it, too, although the piano is beautifully captured. **Hugo Shirley**

## Pärt

‘Babel’

Magnificat. Beaitudines. Nunc dimittis.

Drei Hirtenkinder aus Fátima. The Deer’s Cry.

Da pacem Domine. An den Wassern zu Babel sassen wir und weinten. Littlemore Tractus.

Vater unser

Wilten Boys’ Choir / Johannes Stecher *org/pf*

Col Legno © WWEICD20427 (57' • DDD)



The origins of the Innsbruck-based Wilten Boys’ Choir stretch back to the 13th century. Their director since 1991 has been Johannes Stecher. He has nourished a carefully moulded – though distinctive – choral sound, notable for its vibrato-laden top treble line (which imparts just enough of a hint of fragility to be refreshing) coupled with super-smooth and firm tenor and bass registers. This 80th-birthday tribute to Arvo Pärt claims to be the first-ever disc of his vocal music performed by a boys’ choir, and includes two premiere recordings.

For some listeners, 57 minutes’ worth of Pärt may be too much to take in one sitting. Although much of the programme matches Philip Borg-Wheeler’s description of Pärt’s style as ‘unruffled tranquillity’, there are a few moments of unbuttoned ecstasy, for example in the *Littlemore Tractus* and the light-hearted, almost folksy *Drei Hirtenkinder aus Fátima*, composed as recently as 2014. The highlight of the disc is the affecting setting of *By the Waters of Babylon*. Its soaring phrases perfectly match the acoustics of the Tyrolean churches where these tracks were taped in 2013-14. The final outburst is truly spine-tingling.

On the other hand, *The Deer’s Cry* (sung in English) becomes rather wearisome. Another bonus is Stecher’s splendid organ-playing, for example in the ‘mashed-up’ distortion of elements from Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D minor which concludes the 2011 version of *The Beatitudes*. As a curious appendix, the short *Vater unser* is sung by an uncredited treble soloist with a remarkably fruity quasi-contralto voice. A mixed result, therefore, which Pärt completists will, though, surely relish.

**Malcolm Riley**

## Praetorius

**H Praetorius** Magnificat quarti toni. O quam pulchra es. Quam pulchra es, amica mea. Surge, propera, amica mea. Tota pulchra es. Vulnerasti cor meum **J Praetorius** Indica mihi. Quam pulchra es. Veni in hortum meum **M Praetorius** Magnificat per omnes versus super ut re mi fa sol la. Nigra sum sed formosa

Balthasar Neumann Choir and Ensemble /

Pablo Heras-Casado

Archiv © 479 4522AH (72' • DDD • T/t)



The young Spanish conductor Pablo Heras-Casado has established himself as

one to watch in a series of impressive performances, recordings and prizes. He conducts everything from Mahler and Weill to Hasse; his first love, however, is Renaissance choral music – the repertoire he first encountered as a treble. His latest release returns to this heartland, championing the ‘largely unknown’ repertoire of north Germany’s Protestant composers from the late Renaissance and early Baroque. Conveniently united by the same surname, only two of the Praetoriuses featured here are actually related. Hieronymus (1560-1629) and Jacob (1586-1651) are father and son, part of a musical dynasty from Hamburg, while Michael Praetorius (1571-1621) was based at the court of Wolfenbüttel.

While the unfamiliarity of this repertoire may be overstated by the booklet-notes, it’s still a welcome addition to the DG catalogue. With such a mainstream champion, might this attractive music – vibrantly rhythmic and filled with harmonic surprises – reach an audience that The Cardinal’s Musick’s fine 2008 recording (Hieronymus – Hyperion, 10/08) or the Bremen Baroque Consort’s 2007 release (Michael – CPO) haven’t?

The performances here seem determined to do so. Dynamic contrasts and the episodic character of many of the alternatim *Magnificats* are heightened, creating textural extremes that shift between the most fragile of solo-voice verse sections to full instrumental and vocal forces (liberally decorated with some fine cornett embellishments – highlights of the superb orchestral playing). While this is exciting moment to moment, it risks distorting the basic architecture of the music, giving it a Mahlerian heft that overwhelms its more modest proportions.

Thrilling in full spate, the Balthasar Neumann Choir sound uncharacteristically brittle and underpowered in lighter sections, artificially suppressed, it seems, in order to emphasise climaxes. Rhythms too, often syncopated and never far from a dance, are flattened and smoothed out for much of the disc, only allowed to flourish in closing *Glorias*. Like a black-and-white film with colour artificially added later, this repertoire achieves a certain new intensity here. But these brilliant shades feel oddly inorganic to music whose original monochrome dramas have their own impact. **Alexandra Coghlan**



The Gürzenich Orchestra and massed choruses performing Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* in Cologne

## Schoenberg

### Gurrelieder

**Barbara Haveman** *sop* **Claudia Mahnke** *mez*  
**Brandon Jovanovich, Gerhard Siegel** *tens*  
**Thomas Bauer** *bar* **Johannes Martin Kränzle** *spkr*  
**Netherlands Female Youth Choir; Cologne**  
**Cathedral Choir, Male Voices and Vocal Ensemble;**  
**Chorus of the Bach-Verein, Cologne;**  
**Kartäuserkantorei, Cologne; Cologne**  
**Gürzenich Orchestra / Markus Stenz**  
 Hyperion © ② CDA68081/2 (108' • DDD • T/t)



This new *Gurrelieder*, a follow-up in some ways to Hyperion's well-received disc of Strauss tone-poems with the Gürzenich Orchestra (5/13), marks something of a departure for the label. Though recorded in Cologne with a local production team, however, it's a release that still seems to capture the essence of the label's 'house style', presenting a profoundly musical performance of clarity and intelligence. Technically, too, it's a formidable achievement, not just in terms of engineering that is transparent and gloriously detailed – especially when heard in Hyperion's Studio Master download – but in playing and singing that is able to encompass all of the vast work's demands.

The Gürzenich Orchestra does not, admittedly, make as luxurious a sound as, say, Abbado's Vienna Philharmonic or Rattle's Berliners, whose players – particularly the richly seductive upper strings and luxurious horns – bring a greater Romantic swell and swoon to such key passages as Part 1's *Zwischenspiel*. The sound Stenz gets from his orchestra is leaner, the strings more silk than velvet, but no less beautiful as a result, offering a more delicate picture of longing in the first part, occasionally displaying more languour than ardour; the musical structure and essential clarity are never lost in the clatter of Part 3. And Stenz retains a canny knack for opening the lyrical floodgates when required: the ebb and flow he brings to Tove and Waldemar's final songs in Part 1 is exquisite.

He's helped by very fine soloists. Barbara Haveman might not have the compelling charisma of Karita Matilla (for Rattle), but the voice is wonderfully rich and expansive, soaring up to a powerful top B. Brandon Jovanovich brings a rugged vocal handsomeness to Waldemar, and there is a touching sensitivity and slight vulnerability in the timbre – a Heldenentenor with a ringing top who retains some lyrical colour. Like Haveman, he has all the notes under his belt. Claudia Mahnke's Waldtaube is rich-

voiced and moving, occasionally reminiscent of Brigitte Fassbaender on the Chailly set – high praise indeed. Gerhard Siegel is a fine Klaus-Narr, though not quite as multicoloured as Philip Langridge (Abbado and Rattle), and Thomas Bauer does his bit for nominative determinism as a lively Bauer. There are benefits, too, to having Johannes Martin Kränzle, a baritone in his prime, filling out the Speaker's *Sprechgesang* strongly, without the mannerisms some bring to it – his 'Ach, war das licht und hell!' is rapturously done.

Negatives? The massed choruses feel to me as though they're balanced a little far back, sounding a touch hazy – the concluding 'Seht die Sonne' isn't quite as heart-stopping as it might be as a result. I'm not sure, either, whether Stenz finds as much darkness in Parts 2 and 3 as others. In sum: the set might not jump immediately to the top of a well-stocked pile, but it shines a new light on this fascinating piece and has a fierce conviction and integrity all its own. I can't imagine anyone interested in the work will want to be without it.

**Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Berlin RSO, Chailly (3/91<sup>8</sup>) (DECC) 473 728-2DF2*  
*VPO, Abbado (5/95<sup>8</sup>) (ELOQ) ELQ480 7055*  
*BPO, Rattle (A/02) (EMI) 557303-2 or 457562-2*

Alexander Lingas  
Founder & Artistic Director  
Cappella Romana



GRAMOPHONE  
*Editor's choice*

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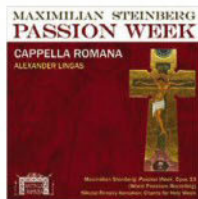
## M Steinberg • Rimsky-Korsakov

M Steinberg Passion Week, Op 13

Rimsky-Korsakov Chant Arrangements for Holy Week

Cappella Romana / Alexander Lingas

Cappella Romana © CR414CD (62' • DDD • T/t)



This important and exciting release from the Portland, Oregon-based 26-strong

chamber choir is a notable successor to their 'Good Friday in Jerusalem' disc (5/15). Under their inspiring director Alexander Lingas they turn their attention to a recently rediscovered choral gem, the 47-minute long *Passion Week* by the Lithuanian-born composer Maximilian Steinberg (1883–1946). This recording closely followed what is believed to have been the premiere complete performance by these forces.

Having chosen to stay in Russia after the 1917 Revolution, Steinberg completed this piece in 1923, just one month before the ban on all sacred music and the stepping-up of persecution of the Orthodox Church. This was, effectively, the last major sacred work to be composed in Soviet Russia.

Steinberg took Grechaninov's Op 58 *Passion Week* of 1912 as his model, and 11 of his work's dozen movements are based on early Znamenny, Kievan and Bulgarian chants. The one original composition, 'The Wise Thief', is almost a pastiche, its idiom taking us a little further on from Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil*.

The *a cappella* textures spread variously and luxuriantly into 12 parts, requiring, as might be expected, the sopranos to soar with jewel-like brilliance and the basses to delve to their reedy subterranean depths. Cappella Romana cope with all of this with an eloquent brilliance, singing with tremendous relish, as though this obscure masterpiece had been in their repertoire for years. Their unanimity of attack and fastidious approach to dynamic contrasts are just two hallmarks of an outstanding achievement. Hats off, too, to Preston Smith and Steve Barnett for their superb engineering and production.

It is entirely fitting that the rest of the disc consists of five *Chant Arrangements for Holy Week* by Steinberg's father-in-law Rimsky-Korsakov. They are taken from two anthologies (published in 1884–86 and posthumously in 1910) which achieved a modest success with Russian choirs. The most substantial arrangement is the concluding track on the disc, the magnificent 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence'. Although it doesn't quite reach the

ecstatic mysticism of Bairstow's masterly setting, it does receive the finest advocacy from these fine musicians. This is definitely a disc to savour. **Malcolm Riley**

## Tomášek

Gedichte von Goethe. Sechs böhmische Lieder, Op 71. Drei Gesänge, Op 92

Renata Pokupić *mez* Roger Vignoles *pf*

Hyperion © CDA67966 (61' • DDD • T/t)



In 1816 Goethe received a package from Vienna containing a volume

of songs by the young Franz Schubert. The Weimar sage returned it without a word of acknowledgement. Schubert's older Bohemian contemporary Václav Tomášek (1774–1850) was luckier. His Goethe songs found immediate favour when he sent some of them to the poet on spec. The two men corresponded and subsequently met at a Czech spa, where Tomášek touched the aged poet with songs including 'Heidenröslein'.

Given Goethe's attitude to word-setting – always *prima le parole, dopo la musica* – his enthusiasm is not surprising. While Tomášek had a gift for shapely, often plaintive melody, in an idiom somewhere between Mozart and Schubert, he never hijacks a poem to create a new musical-dramatic entity, as Schubert famously did in 'Gretchen' and 'Erlkönig'. Alongside Schubert and Loewe, his jog-trotting 'Erlkönig' sounds almost laughably tame. With his roots in the 18th century, Tomášek is fond of decorative piano preludes and interludes. Otherwise his keyboard-writing tends to be modest to the point of self-effacement – Goethe's ideal. That said, there is much to charm and delight here: say, in the musing, gently ornamental 'Wandlers Nachtlied' (shades here of Mozart's 'Abendempfindung'), the vivid pair of pastoral cameos 'Die Spröde' and 'Die Bekehrte', and 'Heidenröslein', set as a sprightly polonaise.

Combining warmth and fullness of tone with the requisite grace of style, the Croatian mezzo Renata Pokupić is a persuasive Tomášek advocate. Her German vowels can be a shade plummy; and in captious mode I sometimes craved more variety of dynamics and inflection in the strophic songs. But Pokupić is always an engaging, responsive singer, conjuring a coquettish sparkle in good-time-girl Philine's 'Die Nacht', and drawing on the velvet depths within her mezzo in Mignon's elegiac 'Das Geheimnis'. In the *Bohemian Songs* (whose original Czech poems are

more fake than folk) she sings with just the right unfussy directness – a flare of operatic passion, too, in 'Rache', with its half-echoes of Mozart's 'Als Luise die Briefe', and in Burns's 'Mein Hochland', where Tomášek holds his own against Schumann's more inward setting. With relatively little to challenge him, Roger Vignoles is rhythmically alert, colours discreetly and seizes the spotlight in the elaborate, harp-like prelude to 'Des Greises Trauerlied'. If Tomášek's songs, like Mozart's, are probably best enjoyed a handful at a time, the Pokupić-Vignoles duo, and Susan Youens's stimulating booklet essay, make an eloquent case for their revival.

**Richard Wigmore**

## Weir

All the Ends of the Earth<sup>a</sup>. Magnificat and Nunc dimittis. Missa del Cid<sup>b</sup>. The Song Sung True. Storm<sup>c</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Charles Gibbs *narr* BBC Singers / David Hill with

<sup>c</sup>Choristers of Temple Church; <sup>a</sup>cEndymion

Signum © SIGCD421 (62' • DDD • T/t)



Vocal – particularly choral – music has been a strong and persistent thread through Judith

Weir's output from the start and this collection brings together works from a 25-year period. The earliest is perhaps the best known, *Missa del Cid* (1988), a 20-minute mini-oratorio for narrator and unaccompanied chorus, here receiving its second recording. David Fanning had reservations about the presentation of the first, by Combattimento with Nick Herrett as the Evangelist (3/90 – nla), but the BBC Singers's newcomer is much more successful, the harmonies clear, certainly anything but 'tiring on the ear', and Charles Gibbs's narration perfectly timed.

Clarity of thought and texture is apparent in the concise setting of the unaccompanied *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* (2011), a conventional form as ever approached by Weir with a keen ear uncluttered by tradition constraints. *The Song Sung True* (2013) is the most recent item, four pithy songs composed for the London Lawyers' Chorus, setting Spence, Shakespeare, Fletcher and Edward Lear in a thoroughly uncontroversial but very entertaining manner. Two accompanied works from the 1990s top and tail the programme, the titular work here – *Storm* (1997), a vividly atmospheric five-movement suite for female voices setting fragments from *The Tempest* – and *All the Ends of the Earth* (1999), a superb and subtle reimagining of Perotin, which

has been recorded before in a mixed-composer collection for the same label.

These works were recorded last year before Weir took up her role as Associate Composer for the BBC Singers; the high quality of their interpretations of these five works bode well for their working relationship and promises much for the new works to come between now and the end of 2017.

Guy Rickards

## 'Cantar de Amor'

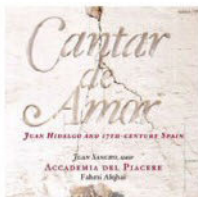
'Juan Hidalgo and 17th-Century Spain'

**Falconieri** Ciaccona a tre. Passacalle a tre  
**Guerau** Marionas **Hidalgo** Ay amor, ay ausencia.  
Ay, que me río de amor. Esperar, sentir, morir.  
La noche tenebrosa. Rompa el aire en suspiros.  
Trompicaúlas Amor **Marín** No piense Menguilla  
ya **Romero 'Capitán'** Ay, que me muero de zelos.  
Romeroico florido **Sanz** Passacalle sobre la D.  
Pavana

**Juan Sancho** ten **Accademia del Piacere** /

**Fahmi Alqhai** va da gamba

Glossa Ⓢ GCDP33204 (57' • DDD)



As the booklet-notes for this engaging disc point out, opera didn't really catch on in

17th-century Spain, despite the efforts of a few enthusiasts. That description doesn't really do Juan Hidalgo justice, however: the songs recorded here have charm and distinction, and his collaborations with the playwright Pedro Calderón (including a song on this recording) resulted in several experiments that might have been taken further. The backbone of the performances is the vividly detailed work of the Accademia del Piacere, to whom several instrumental pieces are entrusted. Arranged by the ensemble's director, Fahmi Alqhai, these reinterpret otherwise familiar ground basses in a way that sounds fresh and original.

The star turn here is arguably the tenor Juan Sancho, who seems to me to capture – and this is intended as a compliment – the rather unattractive persona of the enamoured Spanish hidalgo (the word, also the composer's surname, meaning 'noble'), studiously languid, arrogant and histrionically self-pitying in the face of rejection. Portraying that persona is not without risk, and it took me a couple of runs through the disc to appreciate it. (Our times, hypocritically, feign a dislike of posturing.) Occasionally, the mask slips and the hidalgo's disdainful swagger is revealed (as in *Trompicaúlas Amor* or *Ay que me río de amor*), but before long he's his old self-

involved self (did I mention that he's really hard to like?). While the music may never win him the sympathy of any but the confirmed narcissist, it keeps everyone else listening, all disbelief suspended. As an essay in characterisation, this is superb. The recitative *Rompa el aire in suspiros* offers a poignant glimpse of what might have been had the Spanish nobles taken opera to their collective bosom.

Fabrice Fitch

## 'I have set my hert so hy'

**Anonymous** Ave Maria I say. Bryd one brere

(arr Lyons). Danger me hath, unskylfully.

Esperance. Le grant pleyser. Gresley Dances

(arr Lyons). Hayl Mary, ful of grace. I have set my

hert so hy. I rede that thu be joly and glad. I syng

of a mayden (arr Lyons). Nowel: owt of youre

sleep aryse. Plus pur l'enoyr. Wel wer hym that

wyst. Wyth ryth al my herte. Ye have so longe

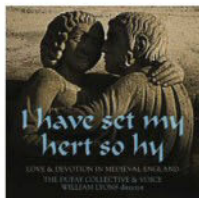
kepe schepe **Lyons** Adam lay ibowndyn.

Alysoun. Blowe, northerne wynd. Corpus Christi

Carol. Maiden in the mor lay

**Voice Trio; The Dufay Collective**

Avie Ⓢ AV2286 (76' • DDD • T/t)



The Dufay Collective have been around for 25 years, generally

focusing on the more folksy aspects of medieval music; William Lyons seems to be the only consistent member. Here they join forces with the relatively new vocal trio Voice (Victoria Couper, Emily Burn and Clemmie Franks), one of several such groups competing for the slot left by the reputed imminent dissolution of Anonymous 4. They sound excellent, though there is not enough information in the booklet-notes to know which singer is which.

The surprise is that almost nothing on this new CD of English music from the 14th and 15th centuries seems ever to have been recorded before. It has all been available for years in modern editions apart from the few pieces that Lyons has patched together from bits and pieces or even simply composed. The sad news is that so many of the songs are divested of their texts and used as instrumental ensemble pieces. And when the texts are sung, the performers show little interest in their form. All the same, it is truly wonderful to hear a song like 'Wyth ryth al my herte' (in the reconstruction by Frank Llewellyn Harrison) with its endless repetition of the name of 'Annys'. Also particularly welcome is the closing suite of melodies from the *Gresley Dances* (c1500): this probably represents The Dufay

Collective at their best, not adding too much of their own to the melodies but assembling them into an entertaining 10 minutes of music.

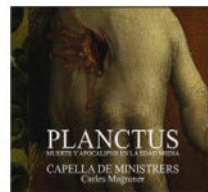
David Fallows

## 'Planctus'

'Death and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages'  
Medieval funeral laments

**Capella de Ministrers / Carles Magraner**

Capella de Ministrers Ⓢ CDM1536 (73' • DDD)



Marking the 500th anniversary of the Council of Constance (1414-18), which

ended the Papal Schism, this fascinating new programme of laments from Capella de Ministrers explores 'Death and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages' through sources as diverse as court entertainments and the apocalyptic sermons of the Dominican Friar Vincent Ferrer. The result is a musical setting of the Officium defunctorum recovered from ancient Hispanic liturgy, including Ordinary movements from the *Misa de Barcelona* and *Misa de Notre-Dame de Kernascléden* interwoven with a varied selection of late-medieval works on similarly eschatological themes.

The liturgical music is infused with colourfully spiced instrumental playing. In particular, the *Kyrie* (*Misa de Barcelona*, c1360) combines taut ensemble singing with improvisatory flourishes of a style now less common in performances of Machaut's near-contemporary cycle. The performance has all the usual hallmarks of versatility and quality that we have come to expect from this Valencia-based ensemble and is rather spectacularly festive.

The use of the *exaquier* – an early plucked keyboard instrument – in the miscellaneous non-liturgical items brings a pungent immediacy to their textures and sharply delineates them from the Requiem movements. Perhaps too sharply on occasion: for instance, *Ples de tristor* opens with solid chords, an abrupt aesthetic shift after the smooth and subtly inflected plainchant that precedes it. Yet Elisa Franzetti's assured performance of this Planh by one of the last Troubadours is as beguiling as it is vocally stunning. Her warm tone invokes an exciting range of colours. Countertenor Gabriel Diaz also employs a host of ravishing hues in his spectacular performance of the somewhat apocalyptic conductus *Audi Pontus, audi tellus*, which contains one of the most chilling exclamations of 'Heu miser!' on disc. **Edward Breen**

## 'Salvator mundi'

'The Purcell Legacy'

**Blow** Salvator mundi **Clarke** He shall send down from on high to save me **Greene** Thou visitest the earth **Handel** Fugue, HWV607 **Humfrey** O Lord my God **W Jackson** Hear me, O God **Purcell** I will give thanks unto the Lord, Z21. Rejoice in the Lord alway, 'The Bell Anthem', Z49 **St Salvator's Chapel Choir / Tom Wilkinson** with **Fitzwilliam Quartet**  
Sanctiandree © SAND0001 (62' • DDD)



For the inaugural release on their own label, the University of

St Andrews offer a programme of English church music spanning the period from the Commonwealth to the reign of George III. With the music presented in chronological sequence and supported by Tom Wilkinson's scholarly booklet-notes, the emphasis is on historical context rather than musical coherence, something underlined by choral singing that is informed and eager rather than finely polished.

The recording was made not in the ancient university chapel of St Salvator, from which the choir takes its name, but in an isolated rural church, and the intimacy of the setting ideally complements Wilkinson's unfussy, rhythmically driven readings. A buoyant account of Maurice Greene's famous harvest anthem is a highlight, as are Wilkinson's own neatly turned organ solos.

The choir's strengths and weaknesses are vividly revealed in the two Purcell verse anthems, which are the most substantial works on the disc. Uneven solo voices of variable quality give way to a robust and well-blended choral sound, neatly supported by Sean Heath's alert organ accompaniments. Most impressive here is the university's quartet-in-residence, the Fitzwilliams, who show themselves to be a hugely perceptive period-instrument ensemble adding real distinction to this disc.

There is an even bigger ace up the sleeve which elevates this CD from being merely interesting to one of real musical value. Unearthed from the substantial collection of 18th-century English music collected by Gerald Finzi and now in the University of St Andrews' possession, three fascinating anthems by William Jackson of Exeter are enthusiastically embraced by these performers in powerfully committed performances. Wilkinson's suggestion that this is 'the kind of music that Purcell might have written, had he lived a century later' may be overstating their worth but they nevertheless offer an intriguing glimpse

into a neglected period in English church music. **Marc Rochester**

## 'The Tempest'

'Inspired by Shakespeare'

**Draghi** The Tempest - Dance of fantastick spirits  
**J Hart** The Tempest - Dorinda's song  
**Hersant** Falling Star  
**Locke** The Tempest - Suite  
**F Martin** Songs of Ariel  
**Pécou** A Circle in the Sand. Pour un rituel imaginaire  
**Purcell** Hear my prayer, O Lord, Z15. Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei, Z135. Let mine eyes run down with tears, Z24. O God, thou hast cast us out, Z36  
**La Tempête / Simon-Pierre Bestion**  
Alpha © ALPHA608 (81' • DDD • T)



This debut disc from French artistic collective La Tempête and their director

Simon-Pierre Bestion is, at first glance, frankly bizarre. Period instrumental and choral works by Locke and Purcell sit alongside music by Frank Martin and living French composer Thierry Pécou.

Divided into a sequence of quasi-dramatic 'acts', the music is designed to capture the 'plural spirit' of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, mirroring the play's narrative 'without restricting itself to works actually written for the play'. It's hard to shake the impression that this brilliant group of young musicians just wanted an excuse to perform some of their favourite pieces, but they make such a stylish job of it that it's easy to get swept up in their wide-ranging enthusiasms.

Most exciting are instrumental interludes by Matthew Locke, whose *The Tempest* opens the disc, and (according to some rather ponderous booklet-notes) was the inspiration for the project. Bass-anchored and percussion-driven, the playing has a real rhythmic kick to it, insisting upon the dances that are then sublimated and dissolved in song and text-settings of Martin and Pécou.

Choral blend and enunciation are immaculate, at their very best in Martin's *Songs of Ariel* - lively with inventive textural gestures, and expressively every bit the equal of Vaughan Williams's better-known *Three Shakespeare Songs*. Also interesting is Philippe Hersant's extended *Falling Star* - the contemporary choral cousin of Purcell's verse anthems, many of which also feature here. It's particularly good to see *Let mine eyes run down with tears* among the more familiar numbers - a neglected gem of rare intensity, performed here with tremendous poise.

La Tempête's avowed aim here was to 'disturb the tranquillity' of their listeners. While I can't confess to any lasting

disturbance of spirit, these young French mavericks certainly inspired plenty of excitement and no little anticipation with their provocative debut. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Il trionfo di Dori'

The King's Singers

Signum © SIGCD414 (73' • DDD • T/T)



It has traditionally been something of a rarity for The King's Singers to produce

either a single-composer disc or a compilation of exclusively early repertoire, but Richafort's Requiem (7/13) and 'The Triumphs of Oriana' have shown an increase in the frequency with which they choose to address these particular projects. 'Il trionfo di Dori' is another such welcome addition: a complete account of the 29-madrigal collection commissioned in 1592 by the Venetian nobleman Leonardo Sanudo, including works by such compositional luminaries as Vecchi, Gabrieli and Marenzio, as well as some composers rendered less lustrous by time.

The customary perfection of their tuning and ensemble are emblematic of performances that can be filed as 'definitive' in a repertory where the artistry of the music is so much held hostage to the tuning of its performance. However, in this music - the crystalline polyphony of the Renaissance - the question of interpretation is more complex and less of an unassailable absolute than tuning and blend. Inasmuch as a generalist close-harmony group can perhaps not be expected to release a disc that could be as specialist as one of, say, La Compagnia del Madrigali (who display, for instance, brighter, more aggressive vowel sounds that are perhaps more idiomatically Italian), this is music given much assistance by the performance of a group properly habituated to each other. The King's Singers bring a sense of perfect social grace and urbanity to this music - the most refined example of its art of the period, lacing together the lines of the repertoire in a way that gives it elegant authority, as much in the musical vines of Marenzio's 'Leggiadre ninfe' as the intricate 'Quando dal terzo cielo', Palestrina's single (but complex) appearance on this disc. It is hard to imagine a group with greater potential to do justice to this music of love and mythology than they. **Caroline Gill**

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# REISSUES

## *Itzhak Perlman at 70*

**Rob Cowan** on Deutsche Grammophon's birthday tribute to a great violinist as he reaches a major milestone



Itzhak Perlman: glowing tone and fluent technique

Celebrating Itzhak Perlman at 70 will, I suspect, call up the broader picture of triumph in the face of adversity, Perlman having contracted polio at the age of four, which forced him to play while seated. Quite aside from his glittering stage career, Perlman's huge discography brings him into critical focus with a vast array of virtuosos past and present, and it's that legacy that will assure his reputation for future generations. Humbling as it is to see this wonderful artist glide through even the most demanding repertoire live, listening without viewing removes potentially prejudicial considerations and gives us the music – and the playing – pure and simple.

The basics of Perlman's approach are easy to enumerate: a fluent technique honed to near perfection, a glowing tone that harks back to the Jewish-Russian masters of the pre-war era and a little later, unmannered but secure musicality, innate good taste and an ability to adapt to the performing styles of any number of musical collaborators. The present set covers the period 1968 to 2001, the latest items including a sensitive and subtly voiced French programme (Ravel Trio, Debussy violin and cello sonatas) with Vladimir Ashkenazy and Lynn Harrell, and a sampling of Perlman as conductor of the Israel Philharmonic, straightforward in Tchaikovsky's Concerto, maybe a little

lacking in intensity in Shostakovich's First (the Passacaglia especially). His soloist – as sinewy and silver-toned as Perlman himself is warmly radiant – is Ilya Gringolts.

The set's first disc is to my mind its best, a coupling of the Berg and Stravinsky violin concertos with Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony, the Stravinsky razor-sharp but emotionally earnest (ie the two Arias), the Berg sounding in this context like Mahler morphing into Bach, Perlman himself touching the heart-strings without sounding either abrasive or excessively forceful.

The Elgar Violin Concerto with Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony is at its most compelling in the outer movements, where tenderness and passion reign, though I found the slow movement lacking in repose. Barenboim excels in the French repertoire with the Orchestre de Paris, Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* fiery and symphonic rather than a mere virtuoso play through. Saint-Saëns's Third and Wieniawski's Second provide further showcases for Perlman's beaming style, the former especially.

The best of the duo-sonata performances are with Barenboim: lyrical Mozart and a genuine meeting of minds, invariably grounded in a secure performing tradition that harks back to Goldberg and Kraus, truly beautiful playing, at its best in the various slow movements where Perlman's

yielding tone, duly tempered, recalls Grumiaux at his finest. These are among my favourite recordings in the collection, whereas I harbour some minor reservations regarding the Perlman-Ashkenazy Beethoven cycle, where Ashkenazy's assertiveness hogs the limelight rather too frequently and Perlman occasionally sounds disengaged. Some performances are more convincing than others. In the *Kreutzer* Perlman and Ashkenazy opt not to take the important first-movement repeat (among rival versions, Josef Suk and Jan Panenka include it), and in the Fourth Sonata the half-smiling second movement, marked *Andante scherzoso, più allegretto*, is surely too slow and po-faced, Suk and Panenka sounding mischievous by comparison (not to mention Heifetz and Bay on RCA).

Mozart concertos with the Vienna Philharmonic under James Levine are, in terms of tone and overall approach, fairly full-on, the VPO sounding much as they might have done back in the 1960s or even the 1950s, Perlman's playing affectionately phrased. The coupling of the *Concertone* and *Sinfonia concertante* with Pinchas Zukerman doubling on viola is the highlight among the various Mozart works with orchestra, though I'd rate French Decca's version of the *Sinfonia concertante* with Patrice Fontanarosa and Bruno Pasquier even higher.

Which leaves strong performances of the Franck Sonata with Ashkenazy coupled with Brahms's Horn Trio with Ashkenazy and Barry Tuckwell, a pleasing CD of Bach arias with Kathleen Battle, a sequence of virtuoso showpieces with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta (Chausson's lovely *Poème* brings rather more than that) and a novelty disc of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with Isaac Stern, Zukerman, Shlomo Mintz and Perlman tackling a season apiece (with the Israel PO), the sort of dinosaur I can happily embrace if Louis Kaufman or John Corigliano (under Bernstein) are doing the honours. Here the effect lacks both energy and charisma. Still, let me not dissuade you. Itzhak Perlman is a great violinist whose life and art should be widely celebrated; and if, ultimately, one prefers on occasion to consider alternative recordings of individual works, that's not to undermine his immense achievement, as this handsome collection, which sells for between £52 and £62, amply proves.

### THE RECORDING

**Itzhak Perlman Complete Recordings**  
on Deutsche Grammophon  
DG © (25 discs) 479 4708GB25

# Modern masters and more

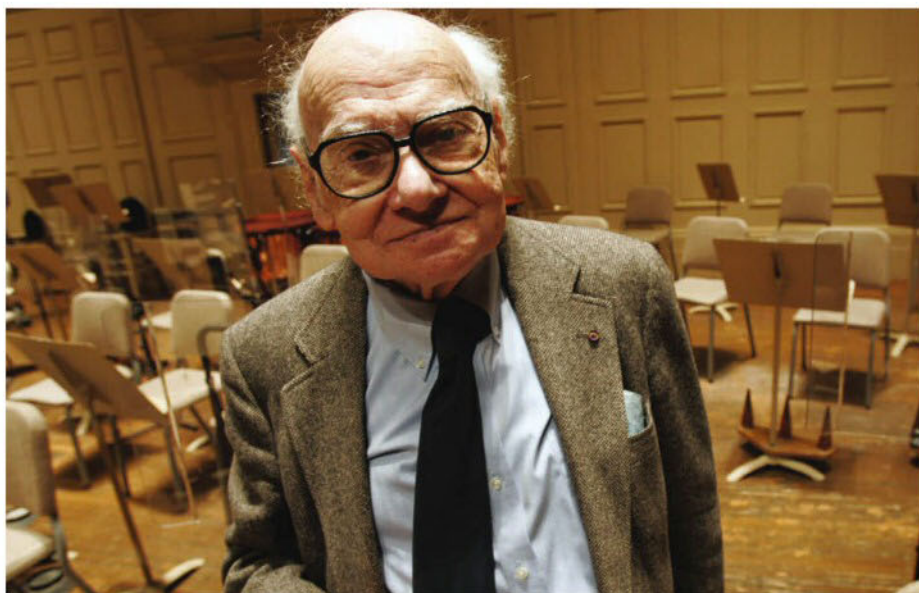
**Philip Clark** enthuses over Sony Classical's focus on some unusual 20th-century fare

**S**ony Classical has gone out on a limb here. True enough, the company owns this material and cheaply repackaging back-catalogue music is a complete commercial win-win. But sitting alongside some certified modernist classics – Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître*, Stravinsky's *Agon*, Ives's *Concord Sonata*, Crumb's *Voice of the Whale*, Stockhausen's *Zyklus* and Berio's *Serenade* – comes a compendium of the gloriously uncertifiable.

Just how often do you hear choral music by Pauline Oliveros, Alvin Lucier, Robert Ashley and Toshi Ichianagi? Or have the chance to sample historically significant electronic works by Milton Babbitt, Vladimir Ussachensky, Mario Davidovsky and Otto Luening? Or pieces like David Del Tredici's *Szyzgy*, Roman Haubenstock-Ramati's *Interpolation* and Gunther Schuller's *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee*, which are more often cited in the history books than actually heard? All this, and more, is yours for about the price of a pizza and a glass of wine. Just don't go expecting anchovies on the side. This is the basic Margherita – the goo of the music without a single booklet-note or any original cover-art. Each of the 10 discs is slipped inside a slim card case, all illustrated with the same anonymous pre-formatted design.

Chronologically, the set starts with Charles Ives. Ives's 1943 demo recordings of *Concord Sonata* extracts, recorded in Mary Howard's midtown Manhattan studio, remain a startling and essential document. Fingers play the notes accurately but Ives's mind is already thinking beyond what has been notated on the page. Playing the 'Emerson' movement, he begins to improvise freely, and we can eavesdrop on the true Ivesian spirit unfolding in real time.

When I assembled my *Concord Sonata* 'Collection' in 2012, John Kirkpatrick was an essential missing link. Kirkpatrick premiered Ives's sonata in 1939 and how disappointing it was to find his excellent 1945 recording slumming it as download only. Worse still, his 1968 remake was nowhere to be found; and I wonder if Sony Classical fully appreciate that their box-on-a-budget has sneaked back into the public domain Kirkpatrick's disappeared classic? It's a devastating performance, the itchy and uncontrollable energy of the opening finding serene calm during the last movement.



Milton Babbitt: listen – even if he doesn't care if you don't

But Ives is Ives, a composer in a category of his own, and the remainder of the box challenges you to piece together where all these progressive compositional spirits stand in relation to each other. The radical conservatism of Pierre Boulez, Tōru Takemitsu, Milton Babbitt and Luciano Berio has precisely nothing to do with the anarchies of John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pauline Oliveros, and has even less in sympathy with Harry Partch's beatnik modernism.

## 'Milton Babbitt's pieces exhibit a fingertip lightness of touch'

Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître* (here his 1968 recording with Yvonne Minton) and *Livre pour cordes* (with the strings of the New Philharmonia) remain for many exemplars of high modernism. Milton Babbitt's early-period electronic works *Composition for Synthesizer* and *Ensembles for Synthesizer* ought, in theory, to be more forbidding. After all, Babbitt is the very definition of an ivory-tower academic composer who, although he was famously misquoted, doesn't care if you listen. But Babbitt's pieces exhibit a fingertip lightness of touch – including the occasional pitch-class set pratfalls – which has never been a characteristic of Boulez's music.

Takemitsu's *Asterism*, *Requiem*, *Green* (*November Steps II*) and *The Dorian Horizon*, as recorded by Seiji Ozawa and

the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 1969, feel oddly locked in a time warp, the composer's self-conscious 'pretty' atonalism a consequence of time and place. 'The World of Harry Partch' – an unexpected cash-cow when it was originally released in 1969 – documents music that could have been recorded last year, or might be recorded next year. The sound of the recording situates the music in time; but the pieces themselves, with their specifics of self-invented instruments and militant tuning systems, remain defiantly immune to carbon dating.

Apparently awkward-squad composers like Oliveros, Lucier and Robert Ashley are the domain of boutique new-music labels these days, and you realise how laudably deeply Columbia and RCA Victor (now owned by Sony Music) were prepared to sink their cash into the backwaters of radical modern composition: a gem like Oliveros's gurgling *Sound Patterns* makes you pleased that some musically minded exec gave a damn. Wrapping it up on a personal note, as an 18-year-old *Gramophone* reader in 1990 I wrote to the magazine suggesting that the time was ripe for a reissue of RCA Victor's The New Music series. And 25 years on, I'm chuffed to find the release devoted to Berio, Maderna, Nono, Boulez and Haubenstock-Ramati included in this box. One word from me was all it took.

## THE RECORDING

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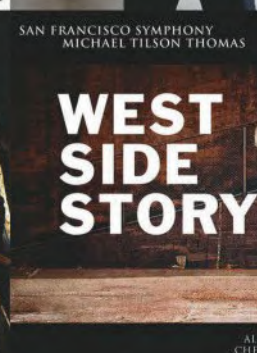
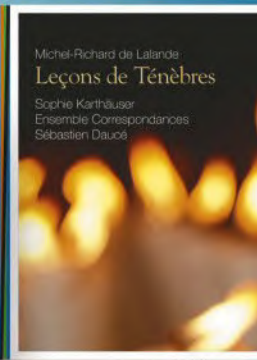
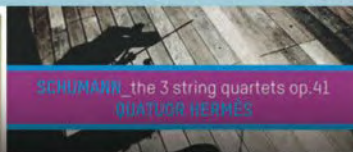
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# Herbert von Karajan at the opera

**James Jolly** on the final instalment in DG's reissue of the conductor's complete discography

Anyone collecting DG's series of Herbert von Karajan boxes (the '1960s', '1970s' and '1980s') will need little prompting to add the last volume, 'The Opera Recordings' (26 operas, 70 CDs and a substantial booklet that includes a thought-provoking essay by Jürgen Kesting – all for about £150). The set includes not just Karajan DG's opera sets but also the group he made for Decca in the 1960s and '70s (*Tosca*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Carmen*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La bohème*, *Otello*, *Aida*, *Boris Godunov*, *Le nozze di Figaro* – nearly all of which are first-rate).

One of the old carnavards about Karajan is that his remakes were never as good as the first versions, and while there's an element of truth to that, it ignores the aesthetic change in Karajan's approach to recording opera (Kesting is particularly good on this). When he recorded his EMI opera legacy in the 1950s, invariably in the company of Walter Legge as producer, the approach was characterised by inspired 'ensemble' casting, meticulous rehearsal and a fairly traditional recording set-up. When Karajan encountered the Decca team, John Culshaw, Christopher Raeburn and others, he came face to face with an approach that didn't try to replicate the opera-house experience but sought a special recording dimension. It led to some of his most enduring successes in the studio: the three Puccini operas are glorious, the casting typical of 'middle-period' Karajan, and the orchestra central to the conception, sensationally flexible and attentive. You either surrender to this approach or not: the *Boris* is almost obscenely rich (not helped by the choice of the Rimsky-Korsakov orchestration), but the attention to detail is mightily impressive (just listen to what Karajan does with the 'accompaniment' in *Carmen* to appreciate his mastery in opera). The *Figaro* is a strange one: a starry cast, full of wonderful *aperçus*, which failed to achieve the status of comparable versions from Karl Böhm and Sir Georg Solti. The Decca sound throughout these recordings remains superb.

So what of the DG period ('middle' and 'late' Karajan)? First, you have to accept that many of his casting decisions simply wouldn't have worked in the opera house – having a Liù as Turandot, and a



## 'Turandot's "In questa reggia" becomes a kind of opium-fuelled lap-dance'

Liù cast in proportion, is perhaps the most extreme example, and Karajan's almost sexy approach takes some getting used to (Ricciarelli's 'In questa reggia' becomes a kind of opium-fuelled lap-dance rather than an imperious mission statement). Domingo's Calaf, though, is magnificent.

Karajan's *Ring* cycle remains fascinating: again, casting prioritises beauty of voice (Janowitz as Sieglinde a case in point) and some of the major roles switch singers during the tetralogy (two Brünnhildes, two Siegfrieds and two Wotans). Mike Ashman summed up Karajan's variability ideally: 'The Funeral March mixes crude glorification with soft-centred *glissandos*. The Guttrune scene is inaudible from everyone, but... the Immolation is, *tout court*, one of the greatest on record, Helga Dernesch's strong lower register and risky gleaming top combining with unmannered conducting and a Reginald Goodall-sized final conflagration.'

So what are triumphs here? The La Scala *Cav & Pag* are glorious and wonderfully cast, with great Italian singers; the *Parsifal* (a Gramophone Award winner) still sounds very fine; the DG studio *Rosenkavalier* is also full of fine things and by no means totally eclipsed by the earlier EMI set, and Kurt Moll is a terrific Ochs (the same might be said of the *Falstaff* with Taddei in the title-role, though he's no Gobbi). The *Magic Flute* with Mathis and Araiza and a fairly luxury cast is delightful though the orchestral sound is a little heavy for

modern ears. And the late *Ballo in maschera* is replete with detail and imaginative touches.

There are a number of live recordings from Salzburg that DG has included. A 1959 *Don Carlo* (in Italian, four-acter) is strongly cast: Eugenio Fernandi (Callas's Calaf) is a fine Carlo, capturing that character's complexity and emotional turmoil. And the rest of the cast is on good form: Sena Jurinac a lovely Elisabeth, Giulietta Simionato a characterful Eboli, Ettore Bastianini a strong Posa and Cesare Siepi an imposing Philip. A July 1960 *Rosenkavalier* with Lisa Della Casa (Marschallin), Jurinac (Octavian), Hilde Gueden (Sophie) and Otto Edelmann (Ochs), in decent sound, is notable for Della

Casa's touchingly world-weary central performance. A 1959 Salzburg Gluck *Orfeo ed Euridice* with Simionato, Jurinac and Graziella Sciutti, and the VPO in the pit, might not seem more than a curio but in its very grand way it's absolutely sensational: as Max Loppert wrote back in 1997, the 'two Italians [Simionato and Sciutti] draw from the words a vitality simply out of the reach of most Gluck singers. Sena Jurinac, tone sad-sweet and melting, is the loveliest of Eurydices. Karajan's conception of the opera I find utterly riveting: not for every day, and never to be copied, but coherent, "personal" and monumental.' Again, decent if slightly distant sound.

Simionato reappears in a 1962 *Trovatore* as Azucena, on magnificent form, but then the cast is the thing of dreams – Leontyne Price (Leonora), Franco Corelli (Manrico) and Ettore Bastianini (Luna) head the line-up. It's not quite as thrilling as you might expect (Karajan's 1956 EMI set has the edge), but Price and Corelli are glorious; Bastianini a little disappointing. The sound is OK but the applause distracts.

Beautifully packaged, this is a must for Karajan fans. For those wanting to be a little more circumspect, I'd suggest buying a selection of individual operas in their single releases, though £150 wouldn't get you anywhere near all 26!

## THE RECORDING

**Karajan The Opera Recordings**

DG © (70 discs) 479 4640GB70

# Opera



## Richard Lawrence welcomes a fine new *Entführung* on DG:

'Once again, Nézet-Séguin shows how good he is in Mozart. His speeds are well judged, never too fast' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**



## David Patrick Sterns reviews Delos's new Simon Boccanegra:

'Hvorostovsky's famous breath control is hugely welcome in Verdi's expansive vocal lines' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**

## Boesmans

### Au monde

Frode Olsen *bass* ..... **Le Père**  
Werner Van Mechelen *bass-bar* ..... **Le Fils Aîné**  
Stéphane Degout *bar* ..... **Ori**  
Charlotte Hellekant *mez* ..... **La Fille Aînée**  
Patricia Petibon *sop* ..... **La Seconde Fille**  
Fflur Wyn *sop* ..... **La Plus Jeune Fille**  
Yann Beuron *ten* ..... **Le Mari de la Fille Aînée**  
Ruth Olaizola *spkr* ..... **La Femme Etrangère**  
**Symphony Orchestra of La Monnaie, Brussels / Patrick Davin**

Cypres (F) ② CYP4643 (115' • DDD)

Recorded live 2014



Belgian composer Philippe Boesmans, just turned 79, was a close associate-

cum-student of Henri Pousseur and the composers around him in Liège. The regular support of his country's leading opera company La Monnaie and of recording companies has enabled several Boesmans operas, often based on classic plays – *Reigen* (Schnitzler), *Wintermärchen* (Shakespeare, including a whole act accompanied by a jazz/folk group) and *Julie* (Strindberg) – to make an impact in Europe.

*Au monde*, his latest (2014), is a setting of a play by the contemporary French author/director Joël Pommerat. In the CD's booklet-note the composer supplies a pithy summary of his work: 'Just as Chekhov is a distant model for Joël Pommerat, early-20th-century French opera is a model for me. My music is of course not that of Debussy, yet elements of the prosody will make one think of it.'

Like *Pelléas et Mélisande* too, dramatically much in *Au monde* happens internally and mentally – but little in terms of visible, epic drama. The enclosed family of a wealthy industrialist – the old father, three daughters and one husband, two sons and a mysterious 'femme étrangère' played by an actress – are meeting to decide who will take over the family business. Issues are raised about the identity of the youngest daughter (Fflur

Wyn) and about the presence of the 'foreign woman' who speaks another language, sings verses (with a male voice in English) of 'My way' and is perhaps murdered by Ori, the only named son who is going blind but will inherit the business. All this woman's scenes carry the stage direction 'this may be a dream of the second daughter', the most extended role vocally and a kind of narrator or Everywoman manquée (Patricia Petibon).

Boesmans's music is quite lush and essentially tonal, although harmonically it suggests a good ear for later 20th-century musical grammar. Scenes are linked, again *Pelléas*-like, with little interludes (or codas and introductions), many with an inventive range of orchestral colour. Vocal lines lie naturally for each character and are crucial in maintaining a pulse where there might have seemed a lack of narrative flow. The score of *Au monde* is a fluent vehicle for its economically told symbolic story. The two live performances edited down here present a well-organised and comfortably recorded reading of the opera by the committed cast.

Mike Ashman

## Campra

### Tancrède

Benoît Arnould *bar* ..... **Tancrède**  
Isabelle Druet *mez* ..... **Clorinde**  
Chantal Santon *sop* ..... **Herminie**  
Alain Buet *bar* ..... **Argant**  
Eric Martin-Bonnet *bass* ..... **Isménor**

**Les Chantres du Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles; Orchestre Les Temps Présents / Olivier Schneebeli**

Alpha (M) ③ ALPHA958 (166' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Chateau de Versailles,

May 6-7, 2014



Campra's *Tancrède* was first performed at Paris's Académie Royale de Musique in 1702 and revived sporadically until as late as 1764 – when it replaced the abandoned production of Rameau's swansong *Les Boréades*. The libretto by Antoine Danchet

is based on the tale of the Christian crusader Tancréd mistakenly killing the Saracen princess Clorinda (disguised in a man's armour), as told originally in Torquato Tasso's poem 'La Gerusalemme liberata'. An abridged version conducted by Jean-Claude Malgoire on Erato has long been out of print; this complete recording was made live at two staged performances at Versailles last year.

The oboes and bassoons of Les Temps Présents play with sensuous warmth, and there is an adroit balance between the five-part strings in the fine overture. The haute-contre Erwin Aros sings ardently as an Enchanter in the Prologue, during which Anne-Marie Beaudette's sweetly assured La Paix and her followers sing and dance while expressing their hopes for pleasurable respite from the toils of war: a *passacaille* featuring passages for flutes and bassoons sways elegantly, and a minuet for two attendants features charming *pizzicato* strings (I'm curious to know if this is Campra's instruction or Olivier Schneebeli's intervention).

Thereafter, Campra's *tragédie-lyrique* is dominated by low voices: Clorinde is a low-lying mezzo-soprano, whereas Tancrède, his enemy Argant (King of Circassia) and the Saracen magician Isménor are all basses/baritones. Act 1 features a vigorous duet for Alain Buet's Argant and Eric Martin-Bonnet's Isménor as they gloat at the prospect of defeating Tancrède; the act climaxes with a chorus illustrating a supernatural earthquake when Isménor and his followers summon up the shades of dead Saracen kings to fight with them ('Quels bruits! qui fait trembler la terre!'); this is sung boldly by the chorus of the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, although more refinement and fewer histrionics would have allowed Campra's innovative storm music to function without hammed-up distractions.

Act 2 opens with Isabelle Druet's plangent singing of Clorinde's anguished realisation that she loves her captor Tancrède; Benoît Arnould's performance of the title-role is by turns suave and valorous, and his character's



Olivier Py's premiere production of Thierry Escaich's *Claude* at the Opéra de Lyon, now available on DVD from Bel Air Classiques

conflicting emotions and gradual bewitchment are compellingly portrayed during inventive pastoral music set in an enchanted forest at the heart of Act 3 (clattering castanets are distracting in the dances). Other high points are Clorinde's touching lament when her rival Herminie deceives her that Tancrède is dead ('Diffère d'un moment, chère Ombre que j'adore'), the title-hero's despondent music when he is lost in the darkest part of the forest at the start of Act 4 ('Sombres forêts'), and Act 5's dramatic trajectory from bellicose victory music (with trumpet and drums) to Tancrède's bitter grief over his beloved Clorinde's corpse. Next we need a comparably first-class complete recording of Campora's *L'Europe galante*. **David Vickers**

## Escaich

### Claude

**Jean-Sébastien Bou** *bar* ..... **Claude**  
**Jean-Philippe Lafont** *bar* ..... **Le Directeur**  
**Rodrigo Ferreira** *countertenor* ..... **Albin**  
**Laurent Alvaro** *bass-bar* .....

..... **L'Entrepreneur/Le Surveillant Général**  
**Rémy Mathieu** *ten* ..... **1st Personnage/Surveillant**  
**Philip Sheffield** *ten* ..... **2nd Personnage/Surveillant**  
**Maîtrise, Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra de Lyon / Jérémie Rhorer**

*Stage director* **Olivier Py**

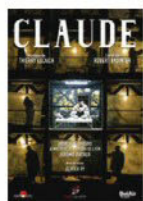
*Video director* **Vincent Massip**

Bel Air Classiques BAC118

(97' + 26' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, April 2013

Bonus: Interviews with Thierry Escaich and Robert Badinter by Anne Sinclair



As minister for justice under François Mitterrand, the French lawyer and politician Robert Badinter played a key role in the abolition of the death penalty. Badinter serves as librettist for composer Thierry Escaich's opera *Claude*, based upon the short story *Claude Gueux* by Victor Hugo. The text, and Escaich's colourful and compelling score – by turns brutal and scintillating – make this opera something of an event. Premiered at the Opéra National de Lyon in March 2013, *Claude* is deeply serious, angry, passionate and demanding, dramatically (if not musically) in the tradition of Berg's *Wozzeck* and Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*.

The title-character is a precursor of Hugo's Jean Valjean, a decent man forced by social and economic conditions to take to the barricades (in Badinter's version of the tale), for which he is incarcerated at the notorious Clairvaux prison. No sooner has he arrived than a fellow inmate is gang-

raped; Claude intervenes, an act of bravery that establishes his decency. A friendship develops between Claude and the delicate young man he has saved, which in the opera becomes sexual and a source of emotional sustenance for both men.

Badinter's tailoring of the Hugo does it no violence, updating the tale's psychology, heightening its intensity and making explicit what is merely implied in the 19th-century original. Escaich's music is tightly controlled thematically, with melodic cells and accompaniment patterns recurring with dizzying inventiveness. Messiaen and Dutilleux are never far from hand; and when the drama reaches a critical point of violence and retribution, Escaich explicitly recalls patterns and textures from the *Turangalila-Symphonie*. Escaich is an organist, and perhaps that has shaped the music as well, including the prominent use of the chorus, the musical repose of several of the opera's most striking scenes, and a tendency to build, by sonic accumulation, huge layered, overflowing *fortissimo* climaxes at critical points in the drama.

This DVD captures director Olivier Py's original staging of the work, which uses a large revolving set to establish the cells of the prison, the enclosure of its walls, the labour of its inmates and the office of the brutally capricious prison governor. It is a beautifully

filmed and unrelentingly bleak drama that unfolds without break in 19 compact and well-structured scenes (including prologue and epilogue). It's hard to imagine another singer matching the vocal stamina, physical commitment and athletic power of baritone Jean-Sébastien Bou. Brazilian countertenor Rodrigo Ferreira sings the role of Albin, Claude's friend. Ferreira's voice can be dry at times but the role and musical line are extraordinarily demanding, and Ferreira's timbre has a touching vulnerability which offers rare moments of vocal contrast in an opera dominated by male soloists.

Jérémie Rhorer conducts the orchestra and chorus (capable of terrifying murmurs and haunting background colour) in a performance that builds to a truly striking denouement. This is Escaich's first opera and it shouldn't be his last. It is the rare work of lyric theatre today that makes a truly moral claim on our attention, an ambition too often neglected in the interest of prettiness, sentiment and entertainment.

Philip Kennicott

## Honegger

DVD

**Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher**

**Marion Cotillard** *spkr* ..... **Jeanne**

**Xavier Gallais** *spkr* ..... **Frère Dominique**

**Yann Beuron** *ten* ..... **Porcus/Herald I/Cleric**

**Maria Hinzosa** *sop* ..... **The Virgin**

**Marta Almajano** *sop* ..... **Marguerite**

**Aude Extrême** *contr* ..... **Catherine**

**Anna Moreno-Lasalle** *spkr* ... **La mère aux tonneaux**

**Lieder Camera Choir; Madrigal Choir; Vivaldi -**

**Petits Cantors de Catalunya Choir; Barcelona**

**Symphony and Catalonia National Orchestra /**

**Marc Soustrot**

*Stage director* **Jean-Pierre Loisil**

Label © ALPHA709; © DVD ALPHA708

(75' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 0 • S)

Recorded live at the Sala Pau Casals, L'Auditori,

Barcelona. November 17, 2012



*au bûcher*, dates from 1938, though it only acquired definitive form in 1944 when composer and writer, conscious of Jeanne's status as an icon of wartime resistance, added the haunting prologue that equates occupied France with the primal chaos that preceded the Creation. Immensely powerful, it remains a difficult piece to get right in performance. The dramaturgy is rooted in Claudelian ideas of total theatre, which look back to Wagnerian concepts of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and forwards to late-20th-century multimedia experimentation, and

the non-linear, symbolist narrative can seem fragmentary if not carefully handled. Jeanne and Frère Dominique, the spiritual comforter who prepares her for martyrdom, are played by actors: as Jacques Bonnaure's booklet-notes remind us, the equal weight given to speech and song has antecedents in *opéra comique*.

Though intended for the theatre, we encounter it more frequently in the concert hall, and this new recording, issued simultaneously on CD and DVD, derives from a 2012 performance at Barcelona's Sala Pau Casals. The acting is tremendous, and indeed Marion Cotillard's Jeanne and Xavier Gallais's Dominique are probably as good as it gets. Cotillard marvellously captures Jeanne's innocence, toughness and terrifying doubts; Gallais is compassionate, tender, and at times tellingly fierce as he leads her towards her God. The impact is immeasurably heightened on DVD by our being able to see both the sorrowing beauty of Gallais's face and the extraordinary way Cotillard's eyes let us know exactly what is going on in Jeanne's mind and soul in moments of silent stillness.

Musically, however, things are more equivocal. Conductor Marc Soustrot pitches the score somewhere between Seiji Ozawa's clear-minded urgency and Serge Baudo's grander, more emotive reading. The big set pieces – the bestiary court with its Art Deco flippancy, the mock-Baroque political card game – register wonderfully well, the orchestral playing is handsomely detailed and the choral singing sharply focused.

The soloists are problematic, though. Away from tenor Yann Beuron and twinkly-eyed bass Eric Martin-Bonnet (ideally you need to watch him, too), there's too much unsteadiness, and the curdled sounds produced by the celestial trio awaiting Jeanne's entry into Paradise don't exactly suggest sanctity. The DVD is essential viewing; but if you prefer audio alone, then Baudo and Ozawa offer greater musical consistency. The difficulty in obtaining the DVD of Roberto Rossellini's full-on 1954 film of the work, with Ingrid Bergman as Jeanne, is still, meanwhile, to be regretted. **Tim Ashley**

*Selected comparisons:*

Baudo (1/78<sup>8</sup>) (SUPR) 11 0557-2

Ozawa (4/91) (DG) ➔ 429 412-2GH

## Janáček

**Jenůfa**

**Gal James** *sop* ..... **Jenůfa**

**Iris Vermillion** *mez* ..... **Kostelnička**

**Aleš Briscein** *ten* ..... **Laca**

**Taylan Reinhard** *ten* ..... **Števa**

**Dunja Vejzović** *sop* ..... **Grandmother Buryja**

**David McShane** *bar* ..... **Foreman of the Mill**

**Xiaoyi Xu** *mez* ..... **Barena**

**Konstantin Sfiris** *bass* ..... **Mayor**

**Stefanie Hierlmeier** *sop* ..... **Mayor's Wife**

**Tatjana Miyus** *sop* ..... **Karolka**

**Fran Lubahn** *sop* ..... **Shepherdess**

**Nazanin Ezazi** *sop* ..... **Jano**

**Chorus of Graz Opera; Graz Philharmonic**

**Orchestra / Dirk Kaftan**

Oehms © ② OC962 (129' • DDD • T)

Recorded live 2014



Recordings of *Jenůfa* now range from the pioneering set conducted by his

biographer and critic Jaroslav Vogel to sets from conductors including Bohumír Gregor, Charles Mackerras (still the outstanding choice), Andrew Davis, Ivor Bolton, Bernard Haitink, František Jílek and others, sung in Czech, German and English. When it comes to different versions (Brno 1904, Prague 1916, more recent reconstructions of one of Janáček's versions of his score and demolition of the one by the initially hostile Karel Kovařovic), confusion is beyond summary.

This new recording is of the 1908 score, edited by Mackerras and John Tyrrell. One matter that counts strongly is the inclusion of the aria sung by the domineering old Kostelnička, early in the opera, in which she warns Jenůfa from her own example about the consequences of an impetuous marriage to a handsome wastrel. It was cut by Janáček (and is cut by both Vogel and Gregor), but nowadays is usually restored. The aria supports the old woman's moral authority with her experience of human suffering, and is magnificently delivered here, as is all the character's anguish and eventual humiliation and contrition, by Iris Vermillion. It serves as reminder of the character's centrality in an opera whose Czech title means, roughly, 'Her Stepdaughter'.

Vermillion dominates the opera, but she has in Gal James a beautiful Jenůfa, appealing in her predicament, caught painfully between her rival suitors, capable of a full lyrical outburst at the end. Taylan Reinhard delivers an impassioned Števa; Aleš Briscein is a Laca who grows in stature to establish his right to Jenůfa's affections. There is a lively Karolka from Tatjana Miyus, and a stuffy old Grandmother from Dunja Vejzović. Dirk Kaftan clearly admires a score which he sometimes rather over-emphasises, as if it still has a way to go to being absorbed into his being. He is not helped by a recording which, in this live performance, can distort balance between the enthusiastic chorus and soloists or



Rolando Villazón and Diana Damrau (both on the right) lead the cast in a new *Entführung* recorded in Baden-Baden (review on page 89)

orchestra. It is regrettable not to have an English text alongside parallel Czech and German in the booklet. **John Warrack**

## Jenůfa



### Jenůfa

**Michaela Kaune** *sop*..... **Jenůfa**  
**Jennifer Larmore** *mez*..... **Kostelnička**  
**Will Hartmann** *ten*..... **Laca**  
**Ladislav Elgr** *ten*..... **Števa**  
**Hanna Schwarz** *mez*..... **Grandmother Buryja**  
**Simon Pauly** *bar*..... **Foreman of the Mill**  
**Jana Kurucová** *mez*..... **Barena**  
**Stephen Bronk** *bass-bar*..... **Mayor**  
**Nadine Secunde** *sop*..... **Mayor's Wife**  
**Martina Welschenbach** *sop*..... **Karolka**  
**Fionnuala McCarthy** *sop*..... **Shepherdess**  
**Alexandra Hutton** *sop*..... **Jano**  
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper, Berlin / Donald Runnicles**

Stage director **Christof Loy**

Video director **Brian Large**

ArtHaus Musik (P) DVD 109 069; (P) Blu-ray 109 070  
 (131' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DD5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s). Recorded live 2014



If you like dramaturgical solutions to an opera hinted at rather than spelt out in capitals, this revival

of Christof Loy's 2012 Deutsche Oper production may please. The action is lightly moved into the 20th century, to around the time of the opera's premiere, and the designs go easy on Czech rustic colour and mill-related props. The Buryja family are sufficiently bourgeois-ified to have expensively coiffed hair and classily tailored wardrobes. As we see the Kostelnička onstage from the beginning (NB Arthaus's sleeve annotator, she's not a man!), the bare white box standing set may represent the prison cell she'll be sent to at the end – although nothing else backs up that suggestion. But, as Jennifer Larmore looks the very opposite of the bitter harrikan we still often see, that hint of flashback and her continual presence point towards Kostelnička's fear lest Jenůfa repeat her own loveless life story.

Other production hints are not quite made flesh either. Jenůfa pointedly observes the Kostelnička's guilty reaction to the 'icy wind' entering her house at the end of Act 2 – does she sense already who killed her child? – and the black featureless terrain (death? no hope?) into which the newly married Jenůfa and Laca walk at the final curtain is certainly a contrast to the 'Entry of the Gods into Valhalla' volume and amplitude that Donald Runnicles is conjuring from his orchestra.

Both Larmore and Michaela Kaune's older-looking than usual Jenůfa give full-voiced, fluent readings of their roles – as per normal now, Kostelnička gets her big Act 1 monologue – but the closeness in their ages (and the near attractiveness of Larmore's appearance) is not necessarily helpful to this drama (or made sufficient use of by the production). Schwarz is also quite a glamorous granny and, as an actress of skill, is predictably used more than the role normally is – the production hints (again, hints) at her responsibility for getting Laca and Jenůfa together. The men are well sung and more conventionally represented, with Will Hartmann a solid, genuine Laca and Ladislav Elgr a baby-faced toyboy Števa who goes completely to pieces when the child's body is found.

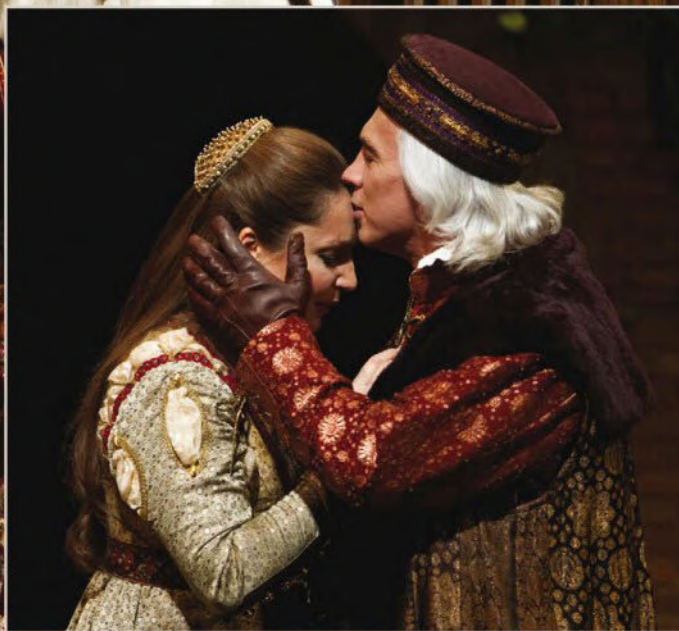
Smaller roles are worked in some detail and Runnicles leads the work with Romantic panache and dynamics (and a touch of Russian operatic violence). The filming appears to present what there is to see without intrusion. Try to investigate before you buy. Surprisingly there's not the expected competition in terms of numbers of small-screen *Jenůfas* – the old Glyndebourne set (ArtHaus) and the 2009 Madrid production by Stéphane Braunschweig (Opus Arte) are worthy of attention. **Mike Ashman**

# VERDI

simon  
BOCCANEGRA

Dmitri Hvorostovsky  
Barbara Frittoli  
Ildar Abdrazakov  
Stefano Secco

Constantine Orbelian  
Kaunas City Symphony



Critic's Choice, Opera News, July 2015

"Constantine Orbelian leads Dmitri Hvorostovsky and a stellar cast in Verdi's Simon Boccanegra... captures the intimacy and grandeur... Hvorostovsky's authority and dramatic maturity are out in full force."

Selected comparisons:

A Davis (11/01) (ARTH) 100 208

Bolton (11/11) (OPAR) OA1055D

## Mozart

### Die Entführung aus dem Serail

Diana Damrau *sop*.....Konstanze  
 Anna Prohaska *sop*.....Blonde  
 Rolando Villazón *ten*.....Belmonte  
 Paul Schweinester *ten*.....Pedrillo  
 Franz-Josef Selig *bass*.....Osmín  
 Thomas Quasthoff *spkr*.....Pasha Selim  
 Rastatt Vocal Ensemble; Chamber Orchestra of Europe / Yannick Nézet-Séguin  
 DG ② 479 4064GH2 (139' • DDD • S/T/t)



This seems to be the first CD recording of *Entführung* for some years, so it's especially

welcome. It follows *Don Giovanni* (DG, 12/12) and *Così fan tutte* (11/13) in the series of Mozart operas initiated by Rolando Villazón and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. The depiction of the Christian and Muslim worlds might cause unease to some people nowadays – certainly Konstanze and Blonde make pointed remarks about the status of women in Turkey – but in the end it's Belmonte's father whom Pasha Selim justifiably calls a barbarian, and the Pasha himself who comes across as a true figure of the Enlightenment.

Once again, Nézet-Séguin shows how good he is in Mozart. His speeds are well judged, never too fast for the singers to articulate clearly. And he has the knack of bringing out detail without sounding fussy. There's the hint of a rhetorical slowing-up before the accompanied cadenza in 'Martern aller Arten' – I could have done with more, actually – and powerful emphases in the violins in the section after Blonde has boxed Pedrillo's ears. Particularly beguiling is the oboist's *rubato* cutting across Osmín's caustic remarks about Englishmen. The orchestra is beautifully balanced, with a fortepiano tinkling discreetly in the background.

In his first German role, Villazón sounds assured, both in speech and in song. He has a tendency to charge at phrases like a bull at a gate, which interestingly makes the wimpish Belmonte sound positively heroic. The coloratura in 'Ich baue ganz' is very well done, with superb breath control (and what enchanting woodwind-playing, offsetting the Gluckian plodding of the strings!). Diana Damrau, an experienced Queen of the Night, also has no trouble with the coloratura. If she sounds a little shrill in 'Ach ich liebte', her other two arias are faultless. The sadness of the first is

touchingly conveyed through her soft singing; in the ensuing dialogue with Selim she is forceful, not resigned, before launching into the bravura of 'Martern aller Arten'.

Anna Prohaska gives a winning account of 'Durch Zärtlichkeit', soaring up to top E with no sense of strain. It's easy to make the mistake of thinking that the role of spirited servant plays itself; but Blonde presents many challenges, and Prohaska meets them all. Paul Schweinester is equally adept as Pedrillo, striking just the right balance between courage and fear in 'Frisch zum Kampfe!'. Franz-Josef Selig makes a superb Osmín, both formidable and comic, rich in tone across a range of more than two octaves. All the cast deliver the spoken words convincingly: none more so than Thomas Quasthoff as a passionate Selim. There's still room for a recording that by including all the dialogue restores the balance between words and music.

Apart from a section in Belmonte's second aria, none of Mozart's optional cuts are made. Of earlier recordings, Jochum's is worth seeking out for Fritz Wunderlich's incomparable Belmonte; on period instruments Christopher Hogwood is supreme. Otherwise, this newcomer will do very nicely. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparisons:

Jochum (10/66<sup>R</sup>, 7/95<sup>R</sup>) (DG) 459 424-2GTA2

Hogwood (11/91<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 473 804-2DF2

## Nielsen

### Maskerade

Stephen Milling *bass*.....Jeronimus  
 Johan Reuter *bass*.....Henrik  
 Nielsen Jørgen Riis *ten*.....Leander  
 Stig Fogh Andersen *ten*.....Leonard  
 Denise Beck *sop*.....Leonora  
 Anne Margrethe Dahl *sop*.....Magdelone  
 Ditte Højgaard Andersen *sop*.....Pernille  
 Christian Damsgaard *ten*.....Arv  
 Danish National Symphony Chorus  
 and Orchestra / Michael Schønwandt  
 Dacapo ② ③ 6 220641/2  
 (135' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



'In this dear land where sunshine comes but once a year...we'd rot away and end up as

compost unless we could like frogs in the duckpond come up now and again for air and catch and hold a little passing sunbeam or moonbeam...[by] bathing in the cascading of dance and songs and light and fun that we call masquerading!'

This Act 1 defence of the traditional Copenhagen night-time revels is by

Henrik, the sometimes rather Figaro-like servant of Leander, son of the household who – despite apparently being pledged to another by his tyrant father Jeronimus – has fallen in love at the Masquerade with Leonora, daughter of a neighbour. It explains much of the simple joy of Nielsen's comedy, a joy picked up in every single review of the (to date) three versions of the opera that have appeared on record.

If you're only familiar with the dark, often tragic Nielsen of his Symphonies Nos 3-5, the greater will be your surprise that this composer could have authored so fluently a kind of operatic musical with an unstoppable flow of tunes and continuous fresh surprises in harmony and rhythm. Rather like another famous pit violinist composer – Beethoven, and his use of many of the effects of the French operas he was performing in his own first two piano concertos – Nielsen determined to rival, and better, the lighter music he was often playing. Clearly he also remembered two other favourite operatic comedies of love and intrigue on midsummer nights in which he'd played: *Falstaff* and *Meistersinger*.

The new performance, like all previous rivals, builds on the strength of home casting at the work's alma mater, the Royal Danish Opera. It's immediately noticeable that the Danish-conducted performances (that's to say the Frandsen, the Grøndahl and this one) are quicker, lighter, more like a musical, whereas the Decca Schirmer set, although it has the lightest-voiced cast in many ways (especially the excellent lovers of Gert-Henning Jensen and Henriette Bonde-Hansen), displays something of a German, or at least operetta-ish, touch. But that audible age difference – there's also the younger Bo Skovhus as a made-to-measure Henrik – does give the Decca a marked advantage in the young lovers' intrigues of Acts 2 and 3. Here, for all their *joie de vivre* and commitment, Riis and Reuter, if not their lovers Beck and Andersen, can sound like they're just acting young.

On the older side of things there's experienced character work from Stig Fogh Andersen's Leonard (the neighbour) and Anne Margrethe Dahl (as Mrs Jeronimus), and a suitably towering comic monster performance from Stephen Milling as her husband. Smaller roles are evidently well honed in this work, none more than the experienced Guido Paevatalu's Master of the Masquerades. It feels absolutely right as well that Schønwandt's conducting refers to but does not linger over the beauties of scoring in the famous Act 2 Prelude

or stress overmuch the weight of more symphonic passages.

The three most recent versions of the opera now available perform the work complete – that is to say that they do not enter the quasi-Brucknerian minefield of the cuts that Nielsen may (or may not) have agreed to in the last two acts. There are, maybe, some problems there after the blistering pace of the opening but they pass quickly enough. What looks like the latest instalment of a re-recording of the opera from its homeland every 15 years or so comes highly recommended – but do try to hear the strong Decca cast as well.

**Mike Ashman**

*Comparative versions:*

*Frandsen (4/78<sup>R</sup>) (DACA) 6 220507/8*

*Grøndahl (DANA) DACOCD357/9*

*Schirmer (DECC) 478 0146DM2*

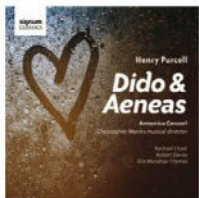
## Purcell

### Dido and Aeneas

**Rachael Lloyd** *mez*..... **Dido**  
**Robert Davies** *bar*..... **Aeneas**  
**Roderick Morris** *countertenor*..... **Sorceress**  
**Elin Manahan Thomas** *sop*..... **Belinda**  
**Eloise Irving** *sop*... **Second Woman/First Witch/Spirit**  
**Jenni Harper** *sop*..... **Second Witch**

**Armonico Consort / Christopher Monks** *hpd*

Signum Ⓢ SIGCD417 (51' • DDD • T)



There's a lot going for this newcomer. The scale is modest: single strings, with a theorbo

to supplement Christopher Monks's harpsichord; a chorus of eight, three of whom also take solo parts. The playing is wonderfully vital: the Triumphant Dance at the end of the first act will have your foot tapping, and the opening of Act 3 is similarly cheering – until, that is, Miles Golding puts down his violin to sing the part of the Drunken Sailor. The players also give due weight to the harmonic clashes in the ritornello to 'Ah! Belinda' and in the Prelude for the Witches. The chorus are light on their feet in the dance numbers but aptly expressive in 'Great minds against themselves conspire' and the final 'With drooping wings'.

The soloists are equally fine. Bright-toned Elin Manahan Thomas is well cast as Belinda, though her phrasing is not quite precise in 'Pursue thy conquest, Love'. Roderick Morris is pleasingly unexaggerated as a countertenor Sorceress. Aeneas is very much the lesser half of the pair of lovers: Robert Davies seizes the moment in his brief soliloquy. Rachael Lloyd – lovesick, imperious, resigned –

is an excellent Dido, her famous Lament no less effective for being restrained.

My reservations concern the witches. The chorus's 'ho ho!'s are pretty standard but the cackling extends to the First and Second Witches' 'But ere we this perform'; and the instrumental Echo Dance of Furies is not improved by additional vocalisation. Minor points, perhaps, not significant enough to detract from an overall recommendation. But don't overlook René Jacobs's performance with Lynne Dawson and Gerald Finley; and of course the young Janet Baker with the English Chamber Orchestra under Anthony Lewis (1961) remains peerless. **Richard Lawrence**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Lewis (3/62<sup>R</sup>, 5/00) (DECC) 466 387-2DM*

*Jacobs (3/01) (HARM) HMC90 1683*

## Salieri

### Les Danaïdes

**Judith van Wanroij** *sop*..... **Hypermnestre**  
**Tassis Christoyannis** *bar*..... **Danaüs**  
**Philippe Talbot** *ten*..... **Lyncée**  
**Katia Velletaz** *sop*..... **Plancippe**  
**Thomas Dolié** *bar*..... **Pélagus/Officers**

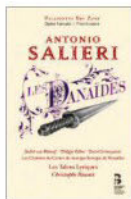
**Les Chantres du Centre de Musique**

**Baroque de Versailles; Les Talens**

**Lyriques / Christophe Rousset**

Ediciones Singulares Ⓢ Ⓢ ES1019

(108' • DDD • S/T/t)



Written for Paris in 1784, *Les Danaïdes* was Salieri's first French opera and the work that eventually

sealed his international reputation. It was initially ascribed, wrongly, to Gluck, who passed the original commission on to his protégé when illness prevented him from fulfilling it, only stating he was not its actual composer when its success was assured. His reasons for doing so remain obscure, though it is likely his aim was to shield Salieri from the notorious Parisian press should the work fail.

Its first audiences found the subject extreme. The Danaids of classical mythology were the daughters of King Danaus of Egypt, whose throne was usurped by his brother Aegyptus. Danaus took revenge by marrying his daughters to Aegyptus's sons, then forcing them, under oath, to murder their husbands on their wedding nights. Only Hypermnestre refused to be complicit, thereby saving her husband Lyncaeus. The remaining Danaids were dispatched to Hades, where they were assigned the task of filling a bottomless tub with water, though the libretto changes

their punishment to a rain of hellfire, in which Danaus is also chained, Prometheus-like, to a rock, where a vulture feeds on his guts. There were initial complaints of excess, though the opera held the stage for some 50 years. The role of Hypermnestre attracted the great sopranos of its day, and has sporadically done so since: Montserrat Caballé sang it in Perugia in 1983. Christophe Rousset's new recording is the second in modern times, and is, for the most part, preferable to its predecessor, conducted by Michael Hofstetter on Oehms.

Hearing it, you're left wondering why its first listeners so readily accepted Gluck's supposed authorship. Salieri subscribed to his mentor's ideas of 'reform' opera, though his style is very different. Gluck deals in slow-moving gradations of psychological development and mood. *Les Danaïdes* gives the impression of hurtling momentum and heated emotion, even when the dramatic action pauses. It suits Rousset's urgent conducting style uncommonly well. The fever-pitch atmosphere is wonderfully maintained. Les Talens Lyriques sound dark, baleful and at times startlingly, if appropriately raw, and the choral singing is thrillingly committed and focused. Hofstetter seems genteel in comparison.

One wishes, however, that one could combine both casts. Rousset has the better Hypermnestre and Lyncée in Judith van Wanroij and Philippe Talbot. Van Wanroij is vulnerable yet tough in her delineation of Hypermnestre's moral and emotional anguish. Talbot registers Lyncée's growing bewilderment at her distress with exquisite tone and restrained passion. Tassis Christoyannis's Danaüs, however, is curiously detached, never fully capturing the sinister authority of a man who will plan mass murder and force his daughters to carry it out. Hofstetter's implacable Danaüs, Hans Christoph Bergemann, is preferable, though Rousset's is by far the finer achievement of the two. **Tim Ashley**

*Comparative version:*

*Hofstetter (4/08) (OEHM) OC909*

## R Strauss



### Feuersnot

**Nicola Beller Carbone** *sop*..... **Diemut**  
**Dietrich Henschel** *bar*..... **Kunrad**  
**Rubén Amoretti** *bass*..... **Ortolf Sentlinger**  
**Alex Wawiloff** *ten*..... **Schweiker von Gundelfingen**  
**Christine Knorren** *mez*..... **Elsbeth**  
**Chiara Fracasso** *mez*..... **Wigelis**  
**Anna Maria Sarra** *sop*..... **Margret**  
**Michail Ryssov** *bass*..... **Jörg Pöschel**  
**Nicolò Ceriani** *bar*..... **Hämerlein**  
**Paolo Battaglia** *bass*..... **Kofel**



Les Talens Lyriques maintain fever pitch in Salieri's *Les Danaïdes* at the Arsenal in Metz

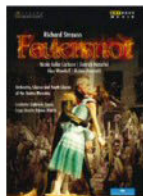
**Paolo Orecchia** bar ..... **Kunz Gilgenstock**  
**Cristiano Olivieri** ten ..... **Ortlieb Tulbeck**  
**Chorus, Youth Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro**  
**Massimo, Palermo / Gabriele Ferro**

Stage director **Emma Dante**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Arthaus Musik © DVD 109 065; © Blu-ray 109 066  
 (113' + 13' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,  
 DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Special feature: Making of *Feuersnot*



Only a matter of months after the release of a new CD recording of Strauss's second opera (CPO's fine Munich set under Ulf Schirmer – 5/15) comes this DVD, an audio-visual record of the only fully staged production of *Feuersnot* to have taken place in the composer's anniversary year (Dresden went halfway, with a semi-staging in the courtyard of the Residenz). The packaging proclaims 'world premiere recording', which obviously isn't quite right, but it's certainly the first filmed version and therefore fills a very important gap in the catalogue. And the fact that it hails from the Teatro Massimo in Palermo says a

lot about that theatre's admirable sense of adventure.

I only wish I could be a little more enthusiastic about the performance itself, the mood for which is set by drawn-out faffing on the stage from before the orchestra even take their places. Dietrich Henschel's Kunrad is established in this dumb show as a composer – this 'magician' is a thinly veiled portrait of Strauss – dropping sheets of manuscript paper into the pit, while a vast troop of actors parade around on the stage. The music starts only after a full 10 minutes of this, but the actors remain, gurning, flouncing and miming distractingly throughout. They make this olde-worlde Munich square resemble the 21st-century Covent Garden piazza, distract focus from the principals (there's a tendency for narratives to be exaggeratedly enacted by the actors and dancers) and obscure Carmine Maringola's essentially attractive set – an advent calendar-like facade more redolent, admittedly, of Sicily than Bavaria.

There are moments when Emma Dante's direction unnecessarily confuses the action, too: Diemut comes down from her room upon Kunrad's arrival there, having to make her own ascent to rejoin him; the townsfolk have all dissipated (to make way for dancers) by the time the pair emerge triumphantly

from their love scene, so there's no climactic cheer from them. The excessive busyness of it all, meanwhile, seems out of tune with the relaxed joviality of much of the music – some frantic dancing to the pre-*Rosenkavalier* waltzes is especially jarring.

Gabriele Ferro's conducting is perfectly decent, while there's lively work from the children's chorus especially, giving lie to the idea that their part is too difficult to be practicable. It's difficult to warm to Henschel's dry-voiced and charmless Kunrad, however. The German baritone gets through the role effortfully, projecting more anger than ardency in his manner – listen to Bernd Weikl on the Fricke recording (Acanta, 1/85) for something a great deal sunnier, or even Markus Eiche on the CPO set. Nicola Beller Carbone is no match for Simone Schneider on the latter, either, her singing rather raw, though undeniably powerful. The extended cast does a decent job, but with varying levels of German.

With so much going on all the time, Tiziano Mancini's video direction inevitably has to jump about a bit, lest we miss anything – to tiring effect. It's useful to have this release, then, but it could have done a lot more to help the cause of this important work. **Hugo Shirley**

## W Todd

### Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Fflur Wyn *sop* ..... Alice  
 James Cleverton *bar* ..... Rabbit  
 Robert Burt *ten* ..... Dad/Queen of Hearts  
 Victoria Simmonds *mez* ..... Mum/Mad Hatter  
 Magid El-Bushra *counterten* ..... Cheshire Cat  
 Keel Watson *bass-bar* ..... Caterpillar  
 John Lofthouse *bar* ..... March Hare/White Knight  
 Maud Millar *mez* ..... Humpty Dumpty/Duchess  
 Rosie Middleton *mez* ..... Brat/Tweedle Dum  
 Rosanne Havel *sop* ..... Brat/Tweedle Dee  
 Stephanie Bodsworth *sop* ..... Dormouse  
 Opera Holland Park Orchestra / Matthew Waldren  
 Signum © SIGCD420 (69' • DDD)



A promenade performance round London's Holland Park of Will Todd's

opera for children must have been a delightful experience, as long as the weather was fine and the local peacocks kept quiet. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was an Opera Holland Park commission, by all accounts a popular success and now in its third year of performances.

Does it work on CD, too? Like most judicious entertainments for children, Todd's opera is nimble on its feet, not outstaying its welcome (69 minutes) and relying on quick changes of mood, colour and content to stop young minds from wandering. An overture with echoes of a retro musical like Sondheim's *Follies* sets the tone. Every number is different, ranging from soprano coloratura fireworks for a singing bottle ('Drink me!') to – by far the best – the Caterpillar's 'Wonderland Blues', which Keel Watson turns into a showpiece cameo. Alice gets a solo number, 'I flew high in my dreams', which future *X Factor* contestants might want to keep in mind. Not much of it is original but it works effectively enough.

In her 150th-anniversary year, Lewis Carroll's Alice seems to be everywhere. Todd's fun opera for children seems to me more of a success on its own terms than Unsub Chin's intricate opera for adults, though neither gets near to capturing the unique humour and intellectual sleight of hand of the original. Todd's libretto, written by Maggie Gottlieb, reads like a keen-to-please modern schoolbook – even down to Humpty Dumpty talking about 11 Plus and SATS. The cast, headed by Fflur Wyn as Alice, and orchestra, conducted by Matthew Waldren, put on a good show. The young audience no doubt enjoyed the theatrical colour and verve of it, but isn't that the point? A DVD might

have shown more vividly what made Todd's opera a hit. **Richard Fairman**

## Verdi

### Simon Boccanegra

Dmitri Hvorostovsky *bar* ..... Simon Boccanegra  
 Barbara Frittoli *sop* ..... Amelia  
 Ildar Abdrazakov *bass* ..... Jacopo Fiesco  
 Stefano Secco *ten* ..... Gabriele Adorno  
 Marco Caria *bar* ..... Paolo Albiani  
 Kostas Smoriginas *bar* ..... Pietro  
 Eglė Šidlauskaitė *mez* ..... Amelia's Maid  
 Kęstutis Alčiauskis *ten* ..... Captain  
 Kaunas State Choir and City Symphony Orchestra  
 / Constantine Orbelian  
 Delos © ② DE3457 (130' • DDD • S/T/t)



What? *Simon Boccanegra* without Plácido Domingo in the title-role? Ever

since Dmitri Hvorostovsky began stepping carefully into the heavier Verdi baritone repertoire, his presence and temperament would seem to point towards Simon Boccanegra. Now that he's there, one realises his highly specific strengths: never an automatic fit with many non-Russian roles, he faces the typical multifaceted demands of lyrical and dramatic singing in Verdi, plus the differences in manner wrought by the 1881 revision in this somewhat haphazard *Winter's Tale*-meets-*King Lear* plot.

While Hvorostovsky's famous breath control is hugely welcome in Verdi's expansive vocal lines, one hears that virtue mostly in his upper range, always the best part of his voice. But what happens when the Doge has to roar with authority in his lower range, which is so badly needed in the Council Chamber scene? He muscles his way through but loses many of his voice's distinguishing characteristics and, with his simmering dramatisation, only achieves true Verdian heat in the final seconds. His scenes later in Act 2, which favour his upper range, are truly Hvorostovsky at his best. How much this incomplete picture of the title-role is a problem may depend on the depth of one's admiration for Hvorostovsky, as well as the qualities of those around him.

Though Delos is no stranger to vocal recitals, this set represents the label's first foray into complete opera; and while perfectly assured on every level, with fine sound quality – the offstage choruses rendered with exactly the right kind of presence – the employment of Verdi outsiders in key positions keeps the forces at hand from owning the opera. Constantine Orbelian has a solid Lithuanian orchestra and chorus but maybe indulges the singers at

the expense of any given scene's long-term sweep. Incidental roles, some with local talent, are well done. And with Ildar Abdrazakov as Fiesco, the confrontation with Boccanegra in Act 3 has plenty of sparks.

As Gabriele, Stefano Secco is a clean lyric tenor who does the work of a much heavier voice, and with such a strong sense of dramatic line in 'Cielo pietoso, rendila' that you almost expect to hear applause (though this is a studio recording). Though a seasoned Verdian, Barbara Frittoli remains afflicted with a wide vibrato in her upper range that even a shrewd microphone placement can't disguise. Then again, she blends well with Secco and is one of the few Verdians whose use of language is both lyrical and conversational. So while not a first-choice recording, it's an often interesting one. **David Patrick Stearns**

## 'Sempre libera'

Bellini I Capuleti e i Montecchi – Eccomi in lieta vesta...Oh! quante volte Bizet Carmen – C'est des contrebandiers...Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante; Intermezzo Delibes Lakmé – Viens, Mallika...Sous le dôme épais<sup>a</sup> Donizetti Don Pasquale – Quel guardo il cavaliere...So anch'io la virtù magica Gounod Faust – O Dieu! que de bijoux...Ah! je ris de me voir si belle. Roméo et Juliette – Ah! Je veux vivre Messager Madame Chrysanthème – Le jour sous le soleil béni Meyerbeer Dinorah – Ombre légère Offenbach Les contes d'Hoffmann – Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour<sup>a</sup> Puccini La bohème – Quando m'en vo'. Gianni Schicchi – O mio babbino caro Verdi La traviata – E strano, è strano...Sempre libera<sup>b</sup>

Miah Persson *sop*<sup>a</sup> Katarina Karnéus *mez*

<sup>b</sup>Andrew Staples *ten* Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Harding

BIS © ② BIS2112 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Swedish soprano Miah Persson uses this recital to go a grade or two heavier

than her accustomed Mozart, Handel and Monteverdi, trying out the florid showpieces of the Italian and French 19th century. Popular though they are, the choice of items and their sequence in this recital are refreshingly unhackneyed, more than just a hit list of vocal display items. And it's a change to hear again French successes of an older era such as Meyerbeer's 'Ombre légère' or Messager's *Butterfly*-forerunner *Madame Chrysanthème*.

Persson's is, as always, a voice that makes you want to follow a musical and dramatic story, one that genuinely talks character and emotion to the listener. She is no brainless automatic canary: the top of the voice and



Italian forces in olde-worlde Munich: Feuersnot's first outing on DVD in a performance from Palermo's Teatro Massimo (review on page 90)

the runs are negotiated distinctly, almost classically, rather than just thrown off with burning-fuse abandon. It was a clever idea to make Violetta's 'Sempre libera' the climax of the programme and record it live with ensuing storm of applause. The scena is excitingly built by Harding and his Swedish Radio orchestra, and delivered deliberately pure (no interposed top notes) by the soprano. As an encore comes a specially slow 'O mio babbino caro', another telling plan to top off the programme.

So here is an intelligent recital disc that can be listened to in one as a balanced concert rather than merely picking the plums off like downloads. The concentration of Harding and his orchestra is not to be underestimated; serious work has been done on all this repertoire, familiar or not. Atmospheric, well-balanced recording and a live feel (is there more concert material used here than just the Verdi?); recommended. **Mike Ashman**

### 'Tutto buffo'

**Cimarosa** Il matrimonio segreto - Udite, tutti udite! **Donizetti** Le convenienze e le inconvenienze teatrali - Lazzarone, scauzacane! **Don Pasquale** - Son nov'ore...Bella siccome un angelo...Ah! Un foco insolito. L'elisir d'amore - Udite, o rustici **Mascagni** Le maschere - Quella è

un stra-stra-strada **Mozart** Don Giovanni - Madamina, il catalogo è questo **Puccini** Gianni Schicchi - Era eguale la voce? **Rossini** Il barbiere di Siviglia - A un dottor della mia sorte. **La Cenerentola** - Sia qualunque delle figlie. **Il turco in Italia** - Se ho da dirla avrei molto piacere **Rota** Il capello di paglia di Firenze - È una cosa incredibile! **Verdi** Falstaff - Ehi! Paggio!...L'onore! **Paolo Bordogna** bar **Arturo Toscanini** **Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Francesco Lanzillotta** Decca © 481 1685 (63' • DDD • T)



The young Italian baritone Paolo Bordogna rattles and prattles his way through this programme of comic arias with an easy fluency (the patter in the Rossini numbers is especially impressive). He sings cleanly and sometimes impressively; the top of the voice, for example, can show a ringing, incisive quality. It can also, however, show a tendency towards slight unsteadiness (listen to the first top notes in Doctor Bartolo's 'A un dottor della mia sorte'), which grows out of the voice's essentially rather dry quality. On several occasions I longed for a bit more juice and roundness in the timbre, which would have allowed more variety of colour: great *buffo* singing involves more

than just the words and notes; it is also built on an ability to use the different colours in a voice for additional comic effect.

This is not something that, as yet, seems to form part of Bordogna's armoury, and one need only listen to more lavishly endowed, lower-lying singers as Leporello (Walter Berry or, more recently, Bryn Terfel, to name but two) or Don Magnifico (Ruggero Raimondi, to name but one) to hear what can be done, respectively, with the Catalogue Aria or 'Sia qualunque delle figlie'. Falstaff, too, is a stretch for Bordogna, less in terms of notes than force of vocal character, while the singer's lack of variety backfires rather in the *Don Pasquale* extract, where he sings both Dottor Malatesta and Don Pasquale.

It's nice to have some rarer repertoire here, however, in the form of the Mascagni and Rota arias, and the extract from Donizetti's *Le convenienze e le inconvenienze teatrali*, whose Mamma Agata offers Bordogna more exotic dressing-up opportunities for the photos that litter the booklet at the expense of translations of the arias (we get texts in Italian only, plus a couple of essays, which are translated). Francesco Lanzillotta and the Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini offer efficient support. **Hugo Shirley**

# REPLAY

**Rob Cowan's** monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## Gems from Melo

A host of radio archive recordings, an American virtuoso violinist, and thrills from Fritz Reiner and János Starker

Not only is Melo Classic issuing many fascinating never-before-released radio broadcasts (featuring fine artists quite unknown to a wider public), but also the transfers are unhindered by tiresome excessive filtering and the CDs include exhaustive booklet-notes, which, for example, relate pianist **Elly Ney**'s alarming policy of giving the Nazi salute prior to her concerts. Melo's interesting disc of her wartime broadcasts features an account of Schumann's Piano Quintet where this outsize personality actually proves herself a most sensitive chamber player alongside the Hoffmann Quartet, the sombre second movement stretching to 11'19". It's a memorable performance, more so than Mozart's Concerto K450 under Ernst Schrader, which is a little halting. Schubert's *German Dances*, D783, sound oddly prosaic. A programme of wartime recordings by the German Philharmonic of Prague under **Joseph Keilberth** displays solid musicianship, decent playing and not much else.

Other orchestral releases include **Kyrril Kondrashin** conducting one of the most compelling accounts of Tchaikovsky's Serenade for strings I've ever heard, the outer movements typically muscular, the 'Elégie' poignant and intense. Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oye* is perhaps a little on the swift side but Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* is played with great tenderness. **Rafael Kubelík** conducts the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Bruckner's Symphony No 3 (1878 version edited by Fritz Oeser; recorded 1959), a reading filled with tension and excitement. From the same concert, Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* is given the sort of forceful, rugged performance you could imagine Furtwängler conducting. On the same CD set there are two Kubelík staples with the Hessia RSO: Mozart's *Prague* Symphony and Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis*, both as gripping as you'd expect.

The brothers **Jacob** and **Bronislaw Gimpel** make an impressive showing on two separate CDs, pianist Jacob with a recital of Chopin, Liszt, Scriabin and Mendelssohn, violinist Bronislaw with concertos by Mendelssohn, Glazunov and Goldmark (which he later recorded for Vox). Jacob offers a powerful account of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 12 and a performance of Chopin's *Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante* where the Andante, which is fluidly played, commands a wide range of expression and the Polonaise is dextrous, witty and generally imposing. Bronislaw's glorious tone (also heard on various film soundtracks) wraps around your heart from the very outset of the Glazunov, a truly engaging performance under the ever-reliable Hans Müller-Kray: just try track 2, the concerto's central *Andante sostenuto*, and I challenge you to resist the purchase. Mendelssohn's Concerto suffers a more remote balance and Georg Solti's conducting is disappointingly matter-of-fact, whereas the Goldmark, enthusiastically conducted by Henri Pensis is, like the Glazunov, absolutely superb. Again the central movement provides an ideal sampling point. Violinists **Paul Makanowitzky** (with pianist Noël Lee) and **Lola Bobesco** (with Jacques Genty) reveal themselves as exceptional players, tonally strong, musically committed, perceptive and technically at the top of their game. Both offer Beethoven's Seventh Sonata, Bobesco in the context of a Mozart/Beethoven programme, Makanowitzky alongside the Tenth Sonata as well as works by Brahms, Schumann, Stravinsky and Schoenberg. A generally absorbing bunch of discs and there are many more available from the same source, notably a superbly built Beethoven *Hammerklavier* from Friedrich Wührer (MC1023) and an electrifying recital of Chopin

and Brahms by pianist Marian Filar (MC1026), whose personal biography is scarcely less remarkable than that of Władysław Szpilman (of *The Pianist* fame). All recordings are in mono.

### THE RECORDINGS



**Schumann. Mozart. Schubert**  
Elly Ney *pf* Hoffmann Qt et al  
Melo Classic ⑧ MC1029



**Mozart. Haydn. Dvořák**  
German PO of Prague /  
Joseph Keilberth  
Melo Classic ⑧ MC5004



**Wagner. Ravel. Tchaikovsky**  
Staatskapelle Dresden/  
Kyrril Kondrashin  
Melo Classic ⑧ MC5001



**Bruckner. Bartók. Mozart. Hindemith**  
Various orchs / Rafael Kubelík  
Melo Classic ⑧ ② MC5003



**Chopin. Liszt. Scriabin. Mendelssohn**  
Jacob Gimpel  
Melo Classic ⑧ MC1031



**Glazunov. Mendelssohn. Goldmark**  
Bronislaw Gimpel  
Melo Classic ⑧ MC2020



**Mozart. Beethoven**  
Lola Bobesco; Jacques Genty  
Melo Classic ⑧ MC2023



**Beethoven. Brahms. Schumann. Stravinsky. Schoenberg**  
Paul Makanowitzky; Noël Lee  
Melo Classic ⑧ ② MC2025



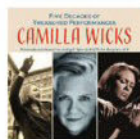
Camilla Wicks: her Sibelius Concerto was much admired by the composer

## Celebrating Camilla

And the explorations don't stop there. Music & Arts' celebration of **Camilla Wicks**, a pioneering American virtuoso violinist whose career stretched to five decades, will prove revelatory to those who have as yet not heard her precious few commercial recordings, most notably a Sibelius Concerto much admired by the composer (Biddulph). The new collection, made up of previously unreleased material, includes a version of the Brahms Concerto recorded as recently as the mid-1990s (under Ari Rasilainen) when Wicks was in her late sixties but in technical terms sounding a good 20 years younger, the performance as serenely beautiful as any you're likely to hear from the last 30 or so years. The earlier recordings are quite simply dazzling. A Tchaikovsky Concerto recorded at the Hollywood Bowl under William Steinberg (1953) vies with Heifetz and Huberman for character and panache, the finale's polka-like second idea played by Wicks with all the chutzpah that Huberman brought to it (coincidentally, also under Steinberg). Fritz Busch conducts the Mendelssohn Concerto (1949), Stokowski the Wieniawski Second (the First is presented with piano on the last CD), both finding Wicks playing with agility and passion. And there are the duo-sonatas, notably by Bloch, his First Sonata – Wicks knew Bloch well and loved this particular work – and Germaine Tailleferre, her First Sonata, a fine piece that rarely receives an airing

but is well worth hearing. Significant works by Barber (the Concerto), Bartók, Beethoven, Debussy, Grieg, Ravel and Strauss are bolstered by various tasty encores. Producer Nathaniel Vallois provides invaluable annotation and audio restoration, editing and mastering are by the co-producer Ward Marston. Strongly recommended.

### THE RECORDING



**Camilla Wicks**  
Five Decades of Treasured Performances  
Music & Arts (M) (C) CD1282

## Reiner rarities

Interesting that when I ran **Fritz Reiner's** Pittsburgh Symphony account of Ravel's *La valse* past my BBC Radio 3 colleague Jonathan Swain – an impassioned and informed Ravelian – he recognised the hand of a classicist, maybe Boult or Monteux. I'd presented the recording to him 'blind' because I was so impressed by the way Reiner clarifies, paces and builds this masterpiece, which so often sounds overwrought, making the denouement truly catastrophic. The same CD of 'Reiner Rarities, Vol 3' also includes an account of the Second *Daphnis et Chloé* Suite (1945, from V-discs) where similar qualities pertain, the closing 'Danse générale' outstanding in terms of both detail and its cumulative effect. Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* (New York, November 1938) is kept mobile without losing its expressive

warmth (superb playing helps), priorities that also apply to 'Nuages' from the two *Nocturnes*. 'Fêtes' on the other hand is full of fire and spontaneity, and so are 'Danse' and *Tarantelle Styrienne* (recorded 1947) in Ravel's colourful orchestration. Also programmed are Honegger's skittish Concertino for piano and orchestra with Oscar Levant as the soloist and a dramatic account of Berlioz's *Faust* Hungarian March (1941). Mark Obert-Thorn is responsible for the excellent transfers.

### THE RECORDING



**Reiner Rarities, Vol 3**  
Pristine Audio (P) PASC438

## Starker and Růžicková at the Schwetzingen Festival

**János Starker** recorded Bach's Solo Cello Suites on various occasions but few of his available taped performances match the wonderful version of the Fifth Suite in C minor that he gave at the Schwetzingen Festival in 1971. Gutsy, rich in tone, warmly felt, rhythmically solid – Starker digs deep into the piece, his playing of the desolate Sarabande as profoundly moving is anyone's. It's now available as part of an all-Bach recital released by Hänssler Classic where Starker either collaborates or alternates with the notable Czech harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková. (Růžicková's 'solo act' here is a sensitively phrased, cumulatively impressive account of the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*.) The two sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord programmed are the G major BWV1027 and the G minor BWV1029, the *Adagio* of the latter being a highlight. Both works suggest an empathetic musical relationship between these two great musicians who recorded the same works, as well as the D major Sonata BWV1028, commercially (Denon and Supraphon). Still, this well-recorded studio recital has much to be recommended and will in any case valuably supplement the discographies of both musicians. (G)

### THE RECORDING



**Bach**  
Starker; Růžicková  
Hänssler Classic (M) CD93 726

# Books



**Mike Ashman reviews an edition of Berlioz's music criticism:**

*'Everything German or Austrian comes from heaven, and most things Italian, even much Rossini, from hell'*



**Andrew Mellor reads a pianist's candid, controversial memoir:**

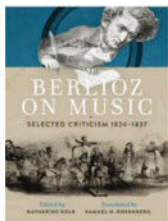
*'James Rhodes is a vital and significant presence who is lambasting our industry into positive change through words and actions'*

## Berlioz on Music

**'Selected Criticism 1824-37'**

**Edited by Katherine Kolb**

OUP, HB, 328pp, £41.99. ISBN 978-0-19-939195-0



Like many of his composer contemporaries – Weber, Wagner, Liszt and, if you count him, Hoffmann –

Berlioz, partly through choice, partly through necessity, was a frequent writer, and not just of music criticism. A brief sampling of the choice of 'reviews' for five Paris music journals that make up this new collection gives away how important fiction was to him, an impression seconded by the titles of his better-known collected essays and fantasies – *Evenings with the Orchestra*, *The Musical Madhouse*, *A travers chants*. And when 'Berlioz is in story-telling mode', as Katherine Kolb puts it, her introductory rubrics to each item here point out the demi-fictional characters of the expert witnesses he introduces, sometimes to make critical reviews of potential promoters of his music more diplomatic. Or perhaps they are to mask what were surely other motivating forces behind Berlioz's writing: to keep his hand in as a composer looking for work and performances for himself, and to use his subject matter (especially opera) as self-training and self-promotion.

Berlioz's sense of style and comedy lift his work regularly above the mere display of technical knowledge, and even that tends more to the concern of the educator or professional colleague anxious to help improvement: 'In such an instance [Ottavio/Anna duet in *Don Giovanni* Act 1] Mlle Cornélie Falcon gives so much stress to the first note of each gruppetto that the second almost disappears.' In these columns he easily becomes a novelistic observer of human foible, like his friends de Vigny and Balzac. Noting at a Conservatoire concert that 'the listeners look puzzlingly out of touch with an experience that, just a few days earlier, would have prompted cries

of enthusiasm', he cannot resist completing the picture of an atmosphere imploding both on stage and in the auditorium. 'At any moment you can hear the worrisome sound of breaking E strings and popping bridges. The usherettes don't close the box doors, but slam them shut. A third latecomer, taking too big a stride, lurches against his own jacket, which sends loose change spilling out of his coin pocket... Everything seems to work against the music.' This is a regular Berlioz plea applied to everything, from the noise of dancers' footsteps in the Opéra's obligatory divertissements ('the Opéra would insert a ballet into the Last Judgement if such a scene occurred') to his pet hates – the trilling of flutes and coloratura vocalism.

Other returning obsessions are fascinating to follow. As regards repertoire, crudely summarised, everything German/Austrian comes from heaven – especially Mozart, Gluck, Weber and Beethoven – and most things Italian, even much Rossini but excepting Cherubini's Masses, from hell. French compatriots are good when they're trying to be original (and not Italian) and loyally supported in his columns, not least his teacher Le Sueur. So, when reviewing two of the leading stage works of this time, for Berlioz it's Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* ('rises to a height that very few of his rivals can ever hope to attain') over Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. For his strict personal tastes the Opéra (despite its ballets) is better than the Opéra Comique because of its musical standards and choice of repertoire. Any kind of fuss and decoration for its own sake (even the setting of the 'Amen' in Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*) is anathema.

The translations read well, especially in that difficult task of conveying Berlioz's extremes of rage or rapture. (Excusing himself for not ending his review with a long list of musical coups in Beethoven's *Pastoral*, he writes 'For a task of that nature, one needs to reason coolly, and who can stay cool when engrossed in such a subject? You would like to sleep for months on end and let your dreams dwell in that unknown world of which genius has allowed us a momentary glimpse.') The rubrics,

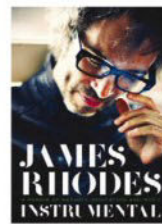
footnotes and editorial apparatus are good – although the length of the former leads to layouts where many reviews start with just date and publication visible on their first page. The printed book has a substantial online supplement which, for example, completes Berlioz's sequence of articles on *Tell*, *Les Huguenots* and Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*. I hope the cut-off date means further volumes in English will follow.

**Mike Ashman**

## Instrumental

**By James Rhodes**

Canongate, HB, 275pp, £14.99. ISBN 978-1-78211-338-6



My head was spinning every time I put this book down. Spinning with shock, compassion, confusion, inspiration, but mostly anger. Anger that a person with so much to say does so with such levels of unchecked inelegance and confusion; anger that someone with so much appetite for change and renewal has missed countless opportunities to practise what he so tirelessly and loudly preaches.

In less than a decade, James Rhodes has gone from issuing his debut recording as a pianist to campaigning for music education in his own prime-time television slot. He is a vital and significant presence who is lambasting our industry into positive change through words and actions. I make no apology, as a writer for a magazine Rhodes describes in his book as 'somewhere between peanut butter and Andrex moist wipes on the scale of worldly importance', for believing many of his ideas both long overdue and bang on the money. I don't find his cosy vicarage jokes funny even when they're disguised in the angry, profanity-laden language of one who's experienced the world at its absolute worst. But it's a compliment to Rhodes that I doubt he'd mind me saying so.

Still, *Instrumental* is...well, what is it? It's a mess. That might be entirely necessary



Pianist James Rhodes: characteristically forthright and combative in his new autobiography

and of secondary importance given the huge issues Rhodes is dealing with (child rape, addiction, the overwhelming challenges of everyday life after experiencing either of those, and the increasing estrangement of the great music we all claim to love). But it's true. The book lurches from autobiography to rant to careers handbook for professionals to entry-level composer guide to industry manifesto to critique of mental health care to rambling diary to tub-thumping lecture on how to conduct a relationship and more besides. It's littered with half-truths ('Glenn Gould poured boiling water over his hands and forearms before playing') and is exhausting in its haranguing, I-speak-the-truth tone.

Rhodes directs his book at those outside the classical music world yet kicks phrases like 'existing conventions around tonality', 'active repertoire' and 'étude' around with no explanation of their meaning. He talks constantly of composers 'changing the world' but stops short of explaining, even in the simplest terms, how they did so. He bemoans the tired language and convention of the industry yet pretentiously refers to himself throughout as a 'concert pianist' (isn't he just a 'pianist'?). He contradicts himself endlessly ('everything about

classical music...is almost totally devoid of any redeeming features'; 'classical music needs to stop apologising for itself') and his inconsistent and incalculable financial references are irritatingly gauche (for the record, owning a flat with only one bathroom in Maida Vale isn't the definition of failure; for most 38-year-olds it's actually out of reach). He relentlessly attacks celebrity culture and then casts composers as 'rock stars' and lingers cringeworthy on his friendship with Stephen Fry; we learn nothing of Rhodes's 'best friend, best man, best everything' – a bloke called Matthew who is pretty much consigned to the acknowledgements page.

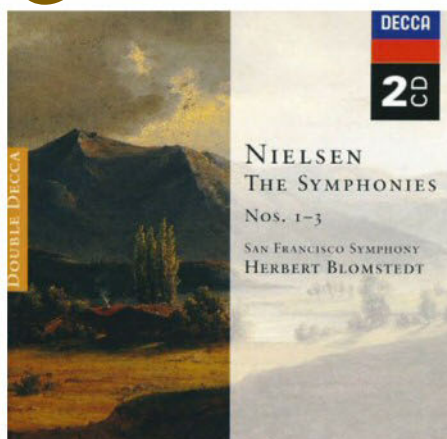
And yet, what a life Rhodes has had – what a journey he has been on, and how astonishingly honest he is when it comes to the abhorrent crime and tragedy of child rape (he understandably detests the word 'abuse'). His descriptions of what he endured from the age of five are graphic and horrifying, and his analysis of how those events have in some sense come to define him both physically and mentally are real, clear, cutting (literally) and devastating. You can't help but fume and weep for him – with him; you can't help but naively will the erasing of the past and the glimpsing of a

James Rhodes who never had these horrors to contend with and doesn't still.

Those horrors are real and Rhodes deals with them astonishingly. But problems arise when music is seemingly crowbarred back into the narrative. 'Music quite literally saved my life,' Rhodes posits in his introduction. But music disappears for pages on end, fails to do the business when required and is never acutely linked to a process of psychological strengthening. Instead, two self-help books initiated Rhodes's most significant recovery process and then, or so the ensuing text suggests, he saved himself through mental strength wrought from love for his son and his girlfriend. That allowed him to pursue his career in music, not the other way around.

Rhodes's fans might not care about these inconsistencies and I hope his book enlightens them in the ways it has the potential to. But as with Rhodes's arguments about crossover music, he should have credited his readers with a little more intelligence and curiosity. He should have offered them more nuance, more structure, more consistency, more musical exploration, less meaningless hyperbole and less cliché, whether they'd appreciate it or not. **Andrew Mellor**

# Classics RECONSIDERED



Critics **Andrew Mellor** and **David Fanning** discuss the merits and pitfalls of Nielsen's Third Symphony from the San Francisco Symphony under Herbert Blomstedt



## Nielsen

Symphony No 3, 'Sinfonia Espansiva'

Nancy Wait Kromm sop Kevin McMillan bar

San Francisco Symphony / Herbert Blomstedt

Decca © ② 460 9852 (130' • DDD).

(Recorded in Davies Symphony Hall,

San Francisco, in December 1989)

Blomstedt is an experienced guide in this repertoire and it tells, particularly in the *Espansiva*, which has greater depth than Chung (BIS) or his own earlier EMI account. The *tempo giusto* for the finale which eluded such artists as Bernstein feels just right here. And it is the underlying

current on which this music is borne, that is so expertly judged. In fact right from the beginning I found my old enthusiasm for this genial symphony rekindled anew. Blomstedt's is an affirmative, powerful reading and although, in the slow movement, the soprano's vibrato may not be to all tastes, she produces the required ethereal effect and the baritone, Kevin McMillan, is also fine. I have one small reservation in that I do find the *poco rit* at the close of the *Allegretto* a little overdone.

Over the years I have heard every commercial recording of both symphonies

(save Stokowski in No 2 and Ehrling in No 3) from the pioneering accounts of Jensen and Tuxen that lit the beacon in the 1950s onwards (I do wish Decca would reissue the latter's *Espansiva* and EMI would transfer the former along with Grøndahl's No 4 onto CD). It is perhaps hazardous to say so on the strength of one hearing (the disc arrived as we go to press), but Blomstedt's account of both works strikes me as by far the most satisfying to have appeared for years and brings added lustre to a distinguished cycle.

**Robert Layton** (8/90)

**David Fanning** This seems to me a classic no-brainer. Every time I review a new *Sinfonia Espansiva*, I find myself asking where it stands in relation to Blomstedt's San Francisco recording. And that's because every time I seem to find something missing in other interpretations by comparison. Often that starts with the first bar, the *Eroica* re-imagined: does any other recording give you such a perfect combination of trenchant attack and natural-sounding acoustic – that blend of impact, depth and warmth in the sound with an almost palpable sense of the thrills to come? Maybe it's because I know what's coming, but you know what I mean, don't you?

**Andrew Mellor** That's funny, because whenever I hear a new *Sinfonia Espansiva*, I find myself asking whether it holds the same *frustrations* for me as Blomstedt in San Francisco! In what's clearly a landmark recording, I'm looking forward to appreciating new things as a result of your enthusiasm for it. But for me Blomstedt sets up too much unchecked momentum in that hard-hitting initial attack. From there on,

the music just flies by and I don't hear enough fight or enough disruption in it. You lose the impact of the rupture at 5'30" because you can't hear the strings against the horns. But yes, the sonority of that attack is wonderful and perhaps unparalleled. Although I think Myung-Whun Chung in Gothenburg comes pretty close to it.

**DF** I also like Chung, both as a recording and a performance. But from Blomstedt I admire that 'unchecked momentum' you mention because it feels to me like the life-force itself, and it carries me over all sorts of details that I might prefer to be otherwise. Maybe I'm predisposed this way by having grown up with the Bernstein recording: a write-off in the finale, as Robert Layton's review of the Blomstedt points out, but otherwise full of that irresistible onward drive.

**AM** Having listened to Blomstedt's opening movement again, there's certainly something about the 'sweep' of it which, notwithstanding my reservations about the grind and disruption, is unrivalled or at least

unrivalled by anyone apart from Chung and perhaps Bryden Thompson. It's quite a sound too – I heard something about planks of plywood over the seats in the hall in San Francisco during the sessions? It certainly adds to the rollicking feel of it. There's actually more detail in it than I had remembered, in a textural rather than interpretative sense.

**DF** You're right about the planks. Decca's producer Andrew Cornall told me that the engineers built a special stage out into the auditorium, so that most of the orchestra was playing where the audience usually sat. He also said that the *Espansiva* was the last symphony of the full cycle they recorded in San Francisco, after a few performances of the piece; everyone felt entirely attuned to the idiom and yet there was still that sense of freshness and discovery.

**AM** Perhaps the effect of the wood adds a certain resonance to the sound. And the issue of sound is paramount in the second movement *Andante pastorale*: first of all getting that sort of oxygenated sound in this movement and letting the music look up –



that even in a more straightforward symphony like this there are several warning signals that tell us all is not plain sailing.

**DF** We're back to Bernstein, then! When I first got to know the *Sinfonia Espansiva* through his (otherwise tremendous) recording, I found myself not really wanting to hear the finale at all, because I thought it was a let-down – kind of would-be-grandiose but without the resources to bring it off. Then, when I got to know the Danish way, I realised it was Bernstein's fault, not Nielsen's. As I'm sure Robert Layton was implying, the finale does need to keep moving and should never wallow. If the first movement is, as it were, in the future tense, always looking forward, then the finale is solidly in the present – certainly not nostalgic or resting on its laurels.

**AM** I'm afraid I'm slightly critical of Blomstedt again in the finale, where I confess I do feel the pace to be too quick. There's that wonderful quote from a Danish critic about it 'moving with the easy stride of a farmer on his own land', and perhaps I feel Blomstedt's farmer is on someone else's land and hurrying to get off it. The orchestral sonority is, as we agree, magnificent. But while it might work musically, and I agree that it shouldn't sound nostalgic, I don't feel it sounds enough like the sort of steady but not pushed 'hard work' that I've always felt the movement represents – like a plough moving deep in the soil. That's a sound I think Schönwandt brings off really well.

**DF** So, how fast *is* that? You know that story about Nielsen conducting the Concertgebouw Orchestra in this final movement, telling them to play boringly in the long pedal-point episode? So they all had a good laugh when they got to that point, because Nielsen stretched and yawned, and the orchestra copied him. Blomstedt's isn't that kind of performance. But it's all of a piece with the rest of his interpretation, and if it's occasionally a bit strong on the exhilaration, I'm happy to live with that kind of flaw.

**AM** Likewise I'm happy – or should I say happier – to live with some of the flaws I mentioned earlier, particularly in relation to the first movement, even if this is never going to be my first-choice recording. I can concede to the probable truth that there's a superior 'orchestral' performance at play here, even if in 'architectural' terms I find it more problematic. Will 2015 produce any serious rivals I wonder? **G**

I always think of two people (perhaps two walkers who 'become' the two singers) lying on their backs. But also the casting of those singers – the human voices who enter in the recapitulation. For me the San Francisco baritone has just the right sound: quite 'plain', as befits the sort of unfussy, Funen [where Nielsen spent his childhood], pastoral feel of the music. But I find Blomstedt's soprano just the opposite: too cultivated a voice with a serious vibrato. She's also quite overtly 'exacting' when it comes to placing the notes, whereas I've always felt you need to have the impression of this music just falling into place.

**DF** Nielsen would have been pleased to hear about that impression of 'looking up'. In his manuscript he jotted down a few words beside that crucial passage where the baritone and soprano vocalises start: 'I'm lying beneath the sky; all my thoughts have vanished.' I think that so long as the singers aren't obviously striving to impress, it can stand even voices as large as those in San Francisco. Certainly the soprano isn't a deal-breaker for me (the baritone isn't exactly weedy, either, is he?!). I also love the

strength in depth of the strings and the fullness of the wind solos. And that brings us on to the scherzo. Nielsen was rather diffident about this movement. But for me it's a crucial balancing act between apathy and energy, and in the longer term between searching and finding. One of many things I think Blomstedt gets right here is the way severity eventually yields to serenity, in turn clearing the air for the finale.

**AM** I find your point about apathy and energy in the third movement particularly interesting. In an aesthetic sense, this movement puts me in mind of the Sixth Symphony and the 'reactive' nature of the way instruments provoke reactions from one another in that work. It's also the movement I like best on Blomstedt's recording and also on Bernstein's – perhaps in the case of the latter because it's the most purely 'musical' and so perhaps better suited to Bernstein's temperament. 'Severity yielding to serenity' is a resonant phrase. You've written before about 'warning signals' in the music in relation to other symphonies; I'm not sure whether I misinterpret that but I can't help feeling

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## Neo-classicism

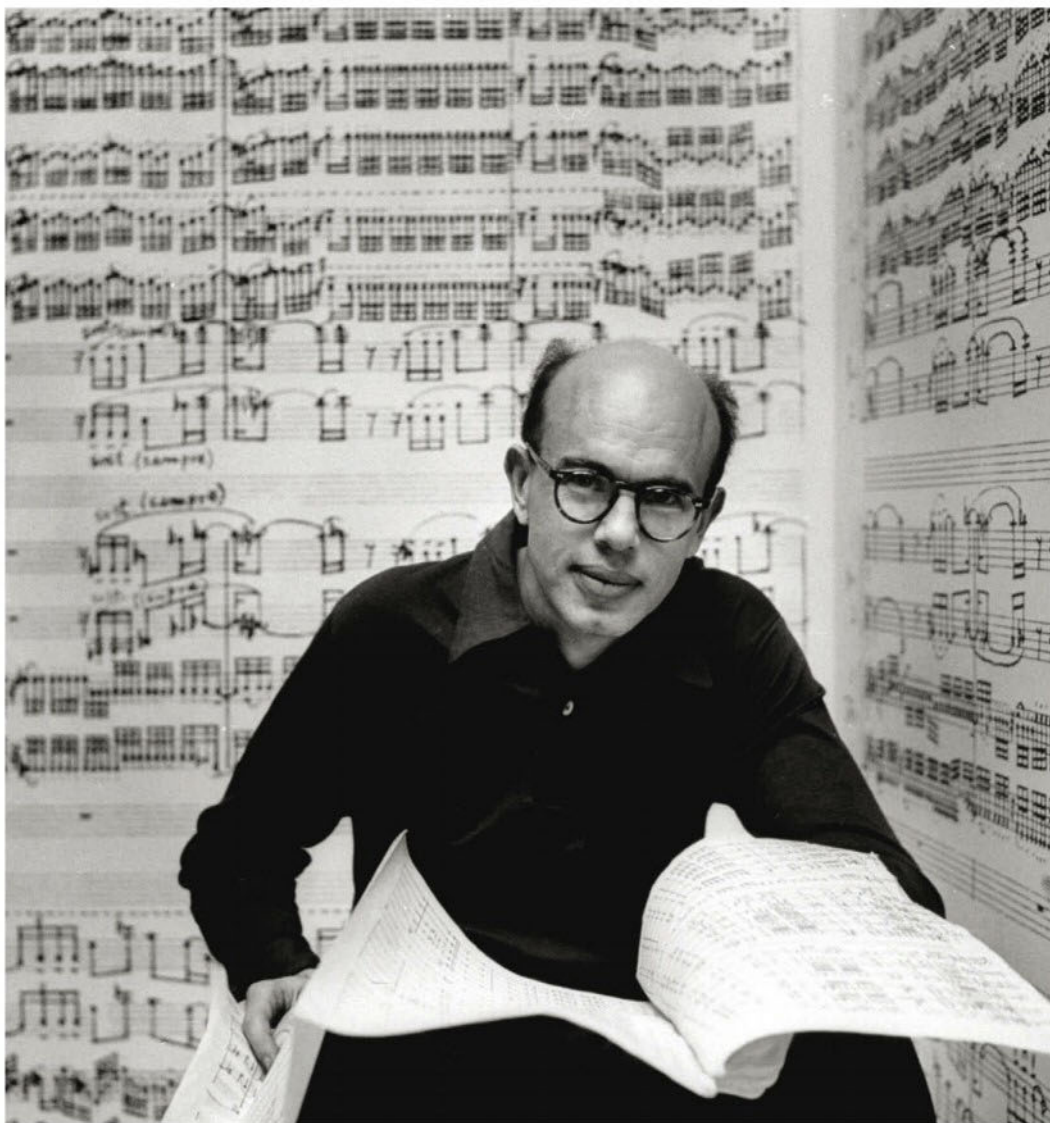
Early last century, post-Romantic music that lent a modern twist to Classical and Baroque styles and forms became described as neo-classical. **David Gutman** recommends 10 of the best examples of the concept

The 20th century was characterised by a peculiar enthusiasm for conceptual abstractions, some positively dangerous, others merely dignifying an ongoing cultural trend. Neo-classicism, a concept long associated with the reaction against Rococo excess in the visual arts, was initially attached to music by French critics bored with Mendelssohn and Brahms. When the catastrophe of the First World War made symphonic amplitude look irredeemably passé, Stravinsky was the big beneficiary, the first musician to whom the word *néo-classique* was applied in a non-pejorative sense. Partly through shrewd self-promotion, his decluttered, deracinated post-*Pulcinella* style came to embody the values of sobriety, objectivity and grace which the French liked to claim as their own. In the opposite camp were those decadently psychological Germans and the dastardly convolutions of post-Wagnerian harmony. Thanks to Nadia Boulanger's influential teaching and the exile of neo-classicism's principal exponents, a mainly Parisian tendency morphed into the muscular mid-century strain of American art music sworn to defend tonality.

Borrowing musically from the past was, in truth, nothing new. What did perhaps set this 'ism' apart was its embrace of incongruity and distortion, stirring up the old and the new 'like oil and vinegar in the same bottle', as Paul Griffiths puts it. Despite tweaking an idiom Prokofiev once described as 'Bach with pockmarks', Stravinsky never relinquished his fondness for ironic distancing and the monumentally antique. Even Schoenberg and Webern were apt to choose traditional formal moulds for their distinctly non-traditional material. Broader terminological definitions risk opening the floodgates

to symphonic precursors such as Beethoven's Eighth, Mahler's Fourth and Sibelius's Third, not to mention that further raft of composers whose fitful retrospectivism is conventionally

shrugged off as nostalgia pure and simple. I've myself passed over Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Respighi, Richard Strauss and even Poulenc in an unavoidably selective sampling of the phenomenon. ⑥



With its echoes of Stravinsky and Prokofiev, some rate Harold Shapero's magnum opus as the greatest American symphony

**Stravinsky: Pastoral**Joan Sutherland *sop*

LSO members

Decca Ⓢ 430 0062 (1/70<sup>R</sup>, 9/91); Ⓢ 478 3243 (23 discs)

Stravinsky wrote his presciently anti-emotive vocalise in 1907, the year of harpsichord revivalist Wanda Landowska's St Petersburg debut. Written for soprano and piano, it is often arranged, and this recording sets a diva's playful droopiness against the unambiguously 'modern' ensemble of oboe, cor anglais, clarinet and bassoon (Stravinsky's own 1923 scoring). Satie had already rebooted the domestic miniature *dans le style ancien*; this gem suggests another starting point.

**Prokofiev: 10 Pieces, Op 12**Oleg Marshev *pf*

Danacord Ⓢ DACOCD393

The Classical Symphony (1916-17)

is Prokofiev's most celebrated statement of his 'classical line' (one of four basic tendencies he considered fundamental to the design and sound of his work), but it's these early Op 12 pieces (or episodes), written between 1906 and 1913, that first fuse his intense vitality and simple lyricism with Baroque and Classical forms. Marshev, not overly tender, is at least technically impregnable. What's lacking is a marketable handle for the set as a whole.

**Ravel: Le tombeau de Couperin**

Montreal SO / Charles Dutoit

Decca Ⓢ 460 2142 (8/84<sup>R</sup>); Ⓢ 475 0432

Ravel, like Prokofiev, can find easeful balm in older manners, but his unsentimental homage to the sensibilities of the French keyboard suite – in the tradition of similar works by Chabrier, Fauré and Debussy – also pre-emptly Stravinsky's objectifying new broom. Here in Ravel's exquisite 1919 orchestration, comprising four of the original six numbers, Dutoit boosts the Prélude's fresh-faced modernity by observing (without strain) the score's extremely fast metronome mark.

**Busoni: Sonatina No 3, 'Ad usum infantis'**Thomas Adès *pf*EMI Ⓢ 456324-2 (A/00<sup>R</sup>)

An unclassifiable missing link

between Sibelius, Schoenberg and the youngsters he mentored (notably Varèse and Weill), Busoni won acclaim as a pianist while writing copious aesthetic commentaries. Wearing a mask of childlike innocence, the Sonatina No 3 may even have been intended for harpsichord (he had recently purchased one from Arnold Dolmetsch). The search for 'something durable again' subsequently gave rise to Busoni's notion of 'Junge Klassizität' (literally 'young classicality').

**Stravinsky: Pulcinella Suite**

ASMF / Sir Neville Marriner

Decca Ⓢ 4782759

(10/68<sup>R</sup>, 4/95)

Disingenuously (the concept of a ballet based on pieces ascribed to Pergolesi wasn't his own), Stravinsky credited *Pulcinella* with 'the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible'. This famous recording of the suite first appeared on an LP aptly paired with *Apollo* (which also appears on this set), in which stylistic inconsistency alchemises into something positively blissful. All sounds crisp, natural and genuine in a feel-good neo-classical experience.

**Hindemith: Kammermusik No 1**

Royal Concertgebouw

Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly

Decca Ⓢ 473 7222 (11/92<sup>R</sup>)

The composer seems to have sent Stravinsky a score of this anti-Romantic, anti-expressionist provocation, to which Chailly brings maximal crunch and zing. Possibly flattered by the piece's indebtedness to *Petrushka*, Stravinsky wrote approvingly to Ernest Ansermet of 'a sort of German Prokofiev, infinitely more sympathetic than *les autres sous-Schoenberg*'. Hindemith soon became associated with Neue Sachlichkeit ('new objectivity') and *Gebrauchsmusik* ('utility music').

**Bloch: Concerto grosso No 1**Francis Grier *pf obbl*

ASMF / Sir Neville Marriner

EMI Ⓢ 456319-2 (3/80<sup>R</sup>)

While Paris-based Honegger,

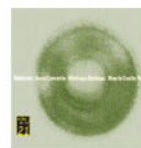
Milhaud, Poulenc and Martinů adopted Stravinsky's neo-classicism, parallel trends elsewhere may reflect the way Baroque instrumental music was being presented to the public. As in contemporary interpretations of Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*, so in Bloch's underrated delicacy, the argument is underpinned by piano. Out goes the cinematic extravagance of *Schelomo*; in comes a soft-grained, open-air modality closer to the genial pattering of mid-century Brits.

**Tippett: Fantasia concertante on a Theme of Corelli**

BBC SO / Sir Andrew Davis

Apex Ⓢ 8573 89098-2 (10/01)

With neo-classicism on the wane, composers opposed to the anti-communicative tendencies of competing modernisms faced uncomfortable choices. Tippett was soon to toughen up and fracture his style but in the 1950s was still writing emotionally frank music, with sprung rhythms, polyphonic exuberance and ecstatic lyricism combining with the more dispassionate legacy of Stravinsky and Hindemith. His star has faded, but Sir Andrew Davis is a famously ardent advocate.

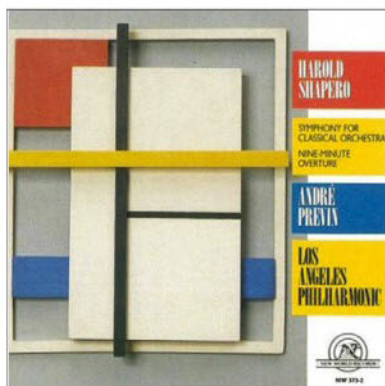
**Oliver Knussen: Two Organa**

London Sinfonietta /

Oliver Knussen

DG Ⓢ 474 3222GH (1/97<sup>R</sup>, 4/04)

While varieties of minimalism have provided one way of bridging the gap between composer and audience, some persist with the creation of precision-tooled work along Stravinskian lines. The first of Knussen's exquisitely layered dazzlers shares the *Pastorale*'s capacity to make you smile, its timespan shorter still. The companion piece is darker and impenetrably chromatic. Together, they offer a pocket history of music from Pérotin to Carter. Neo-medieval? Neo-everything!

**Shapero: Symphony for Classical Orchestra**

Los Angeles Philharmonic / André Previn New World Ⓢ NW373-2 (3/96)

Stravinsky's 'defection' to serialism looks inconsequential from today's listener-centred perspective, but pulling the conceptual rug from under the feet of a devotee such as Harold Shapero (1920-2013) brought on a near-terminal case of writer's block. It was when the master was about to embark on his Mozartian *Rake's Progress* that the disciple

showed him this score (1947), an elegantly Beethovenian magnum opus which some now rate the greatest of all American symphonies. Yet Previn has been its only prominent champion since Bernstein (a chum) and Szell (a sceptic). Amid obvious echoes of Stravinsky, its slow movement draws floaty melodic inspiration from Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony.

# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Arnold Bax's *Tintagel*

Bax's inspiration for this tone-poem – a trip to Cornwall with his lover at an emotionally difficult time – finds a perfect vehicle in his stylistic eclecticism. But, as **Jeremy Dibble** finds, interpretations vary markedly

**T**he composer's intention is simply to offer a tonal impression of the castle-crowned cliff of (now sadly degenerate) Tintagel, and more especially of the long distances of the Atlantic, as seen from the cliffs of Cornwall on a sunny, but not windless, summer day.' So wrote Arnold Bax (1883–1953) in a programme to the premiere of his best-known orchestral work, the tone-poem *Tintagel*, by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra under Dan Godfrey on October 20, 1921. Composed 1917–19, the work represents a culmination of a triumvirate of mature orchestral essays which began with *The Garden of Fand* (1913–16), an essentially Celtic work and symptomatic of Bax's Irish infatuation, before he moved on to the equally colourful but more inwardly brooding *November Woods* (1917), a reworking of material used in the Second Violin Sonata (1915). Then came *Tintagel*, a third evocation of landscape, imbued with the heady spirit of legend and mythical imagination. Written at a time of emotional turbulence for Bax, all three works, it has been argued, channelled and focused his innate symphonic instincts at a time when his domestic life was in crisis.

### CORNISH INSPIRATION

The world of his early creative years, as depicted nostalgically many years later in his autobiographical *Farewell, My Youth* (1943), was over, yet marriage to Elsiea Sobrino in 1911 (made on the rebound after a romantic adventure in Ukraine)

had not proven happy, and during the years of the war he entered into a passionate *affaire de coeur* with the pianist Harriet Cohen, which led to Bax leaving his wife and two children in 1918. In August 1917 Bax and Cohen passed an idyllic few weeks together on the north coast of Cornwall, and this furnished the inspiration for *Tintagel*. The wild, panoramic seascape of the Cornwall coast – with its majestic clifftops, thundering Atlantic waves, smell of salt spume and crying of gulls – mingled with the associations of Arthurian legend and the ghosts of the ruined castle were meat and drink to Bax's excitable sense of fantasy and love of epic myth. They were also commensurate with the composer's unusual spectrum of post-Wagnerian styles, which took in the late 19th-century Romantic palettes of Strauss's *Schwung*, Debussy's combination of symbolism and impressionism, Sibelius's novel organic processes and the aromatic parlance of Russians such as Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and early Stravinsky.

After Bax's return to London, *Tintagel* was composed rapidly, the piano score bearing the dedication 'For Darling Tania [his pet name for Cohen] with love from Arnold'. The orchestration was completed in January 1919 but the first performance did not take place until two years later, and publication (by Chappell) had to wait until 1923. *Tintagel* paved the way for the composer's new, post-war confidence, embodied in a series of seven large-scale



Sunset at Tintagel (1871) by John Mogford

symphonies, which brought him to the forefront of British music in the 1920s. Yet, edifying and indeed challenging as the symphonies are (standing as a substantial high-water mark in the composer's output and in the canon of British symphonies), *Tintagel* has nevertheless remained Bax's most popular orchestral work – which is



PHOTOGRAPHY: CROYDON ART  
COLLECTION; MUSEUM OF CROYDON;  
UN/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

borne out by its regular appearances in concert programmes and by the 10 recordings available in the catalogue. This may have something to do with the directness of the well-differentiated and appealing thematic material, the outstanding orchestration and, for all its structural subtlety, the clarity of the tripartite form,

but it also has much to do with the piece's pictorial vividness, which a visit to the castle remains can powerfully confirm.

#### WAGNERIAN ALLUSIONS

Besides the programme-notes he provided for the premiere, Bax also included a preface in the miniature score in which

he was keen to point out the connections between *Tintagel*, King Arthur, King Mark and the story of Tristan and Isolde, not least in a quotation from Act 1 of Wagner's opera which appears (to quote Bax) 'at the climax of the more literary division' of *Tintagel*. This reference, carefully integrated and not immediately



Scene from *Tristan und Isolde* as depicted by August Spiess in 1865: Bax included references to music from Wagner's opera in his tone-poem *Tintagel*

obvious to the listener, is in fact the very opening idea of the opera's orchestral prelude heard on the cellos, one that is generally associated with 'desire'. In fact, Bax's allusions to *Tristan* are rather more extensive than this one disclosure. The opening and closing paragraphs of his ambitious canvas, made up of two strong thematic ideas, is couched in B major – that all-important tonality of Acts 2 and 3 of *Tristan*; and the false recapitulation of the opening 'seascape' idea (just before letter S in Bax's score) begins life using the immediately recognisable 'Tristan' chord, that quintessential expression of passion which acts as the goal of the cellos' descending figure in Wagner's prelude. Furthermore, it also seems hard to

divorce the hot-blooded ethos of Bax's developmental material (beginning with the solo violin two bars before letter H) from the chromatically saturated world of *Tristan* as a whole. All of which suggests perhaps that the 'forbidden' love of the Arthurian couple had connections not only with the windswept setting of the ruined castle but also with Bax's own emotionally unsettled existence at the time.

#### RECORDINGS: FIRST AND FASTEST

The earliest recording of *Tintagel* is the one made (on May 17 and 23, 1928) by **Eugene Goossens** with the New Symphony Orchestra for HMV. An enthusiastic promoter of new British music, Goossens was a close associate of Bax; indeed, it was

he who directed the all-Bax concert on November 13, 1922 at Queen's Hall, London, an event which undoubtedly helped bring the composer to the forefront of new indigenous talent. Now remastered by Dutton, Goossens's recording at just over 12 minutes in length is a spirited performance in which he appears to use over-brisk tempos, faster than those with which we are familiar nowadays. Bax may have marked his score 'Very moderate Tempo. Broad and stately' (which has led most conductors to adopt a slower speed for the opening), but the metronome marking of crotchet = 68 would seem to suggest otherwise. Goossens's big secondary melody is spacious (though actually not quite as fast as Bax's

#### BEST ARCHIVAL

**Eugene Goossens** Dutton mono (M) CDBP9779 Remastered in 2007, Goossens's 1928 recording has a compelling vitality and retains a fidelity to Bax's tempo markings throughout the score. Here, *Tintagel* is coupled with the brooding Second Symphony, whose British premiere Goossens gave in May 1930.



#### BEST COUPLING

**Sir Adrian Boult** Lyrita (C) SRCD231 Boult brings an authority and insight to this sonorous 1972 recording on Lyrita. The CD also features Bax's other two big symphonic poems of the period, *The Garden of Fand* and *November Woods*, so is excellent for becoming acquainted with Bax's mastery as an orchestral composer.



#### BEST VALUE

**David Lloyd-Jones** Naxos (B) 8 557145 Lloyd-Jones brings incisive and intoxicating energy to Bax's tone-poem together with some splendid playing from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. It's coupled with the fine Seventh Symphony on this CD, which is great value for money and has a vivid and clear recorded sound.



crotchet = 72). The central development, with its shifting chromatic sands, hastens along with a compelling velocity, and Goossens differentiates carefully between the slower tempo of the plaintive solo violin and the considerably faster tempos (to use Bax's specific instruction) that immediately follow it. In fact, Goossens remains faithful to most of Bax's markings throughout this part, and the reprise of the secondary theme (which affirms B major) is executed with passion and breadth. All in all, this is a historic recording worth having, not only because of its intrinsic archival value but also because it's coupled with *Mediterranean* (which Goossens premiered in 1922) and the powerful Second Symphony (from a live broadcast with the BBC SO in November 1956). Goossens was one important interpreter of Bax; others were Hamilton Harty, Basil Cameron and **George Weldon**, who conducted quite a lot of Bax with the Hallé in the 1950s when he was assistant to Barbirolli. Weldon recorded *Tintagel* with Columbia and the LSO in 1953; it was later remastered by Dutton, but sadly is no longer in the catalogue.

### AN EASING OF TEMPOS

The slower tempo of the opening of *Tintagel* which is typical of all the later recordings may have been adopted not only for 'evocative' reasons – the grandeur of the natural Cornish coastal landscape – but also because it does make for greater orchestral clarity. Bax's orchestration, with all its fine detail and filigree, not to mention the technical demands on the players, has a rhythmical and harmonic density which requires carefully gauged control. **Sir Adrian Boult** certainly understood this aspect of the composer's style in his first recording of the work, in 1955 with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Originally made by Decca, it is now available on the Heritage label. Boult elicits a rich sound (surprisingly clear for its age) from his orchestra and I like the flexibility he brings to the score. Bax's *ritenuto* markings are generously applied and there is a Straussian flamboyance to the developmental phase which adds to the drama, especially during the *Tristan* quotations. Boult also brings a noble, almost Elgarian swagger to the 'big tune', and the build-up of tension to the final cadence is very well judged.

**Sir John Barbirolli** had a particular affinity with Bax's post-Romantic world and recorded *Tintagel* with the LSO for EMI in 1967; it is now available on EMI Classics as part of its Great Recordings of the Century series. At just over 15 minutes



The post-Wagnerian Bax in later life

long (compared with Boult's 13'34"), Barbirolli's reading is the first indication of just how much slower the 'seascape' music became in later interpretations. It is noticeably more spacious and sedate, as is the introduction of the wailing chromatic figure – though the momentum does later measure up to Bax's crotchet = 108. The real strength of this recording is the majesty of the climaxes, the rich orchestral sonority and the control of ensemble, though the clarity is at times a little muddy and the outer sections have a tendency to drag (which is more than the final cadence can bear).

### CAPTURING THE ESSENCE

**Sir Adrian Boult's** second recording, made 17 years after the first, again with the LPO, was produced for the Lyrita label. Within six seconds of the 1955 reading (which shows that Boult, who was by now 83, had not altered his idea of the work), this interpretation has a vibrancy typical of so many of those superb, pioneering Lyrita recordings made in the 1960s and '70s which did so much to bring

British 19th- and 20th-century music to prominence. Just occasionally there is some ensemble untidiness, and perhaps some of the development could benefit from a little more élan and textural crispness, but this is more than made up for by Boult's sense of momentum and direction as well as the well-proportioned tempos; and, if anything, the reprise of the secondary theme pulsates with even more joie de vivre (especially that part on the G string of the violins). Coupled with four other Bax orchestral works (*Northern Ballad No 1*, *Mediterranean*, *The Garden of Fand* and *November Woods*), this recording, perhaps more than any other, encapsulated the essence of Bax as a master of the symphonic poem (with Boult as chief interpreter of the time). Indeed, this record was what led me to explore Lyrita's recordings of many of the Bax symphonies which were being made at more or less the same time.

An important part of **Bryden Thomson's** energetic championship of British 20th-century orchestral music included the revival of interest in Bax's music with Chandos, one that included all the symphonies (chiefly with the LPO) and many of the tone-poems (with the Ulster Orchestra). His recording of *Tintagel*, made in 1983, was originally coupled with the Fourth Symphony, but it is now available with other tone-poems on the Chandos Classics label. Like Barbirolli's 1967 reading, Thomson's is a munificent 15 minutes, and throughout the score he is consistently more measured in his slower tempos (though by the middle of the developmental section he does more or less reach crotchet = 104). In its favour this recording has a luminous clarity. The rich chords of the brass and the detail of the wind and string accompaniments (as well as the harp) are splendidly evocative, and there is much care given to solo writing, which is welcome given the complexity of Bax's orchestration. Thomson succeeds in lending mystery and intensity to Bax's arch form, and his conception of the

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1928	New SO / <b>Goossens</b>	Dutton mono (M) CDBP9779; Symposium (P) 1336 (2/04)
1953	LSO / <b>Weldon</b>	Dutton mono (M) CDCLP4002 (4/54 <sup>th</sup> , 7/97 - nla)
1955	LPO / <b>Boult</b>	Heritage mono (M) HTGCD233; Belart (B) 461 354-2 (9/97)
1967	LSO / <b>Barbirolli</b>	EMI/Warner Classics (M) 379983-2 (2/67 <sup>th</sup> , 3/95 <sup>th</sup> , 6/07)
1972	LPO / <b>Boult</b>	Lyrita (P) SRCD231 (9/92)
1983	Ulster Orch / <b>Thomson</b>	Chandos (P) CHAN8312; (B) CHANI0156 (1/84 <sup>th</sup> , 8/84 <sup>th</sup> , 2/94 <sup>th</sup> )
1998	Munich SO / <b>Bostock</b>	Classico (P) CLASSCD254 (5/99)
2002	BBC PO / <b>Handley</b>	Chandos (B) (S) CHANI0122 (12/03)
2002	RSNO / <b>Lloyd-Jones</b>	Naxos (B) 8 557145 (A/03); (S) 8 557599 (A/05)
2005	Hallé Orch / <b>Elder</b>	Hallé (P) CDHLL7512 (12/06); (S) (4) CDHLD7532
2007	LPO / <b>Vänskä</b>	LPO (M) LPO0036 (3/09)



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Boult in 1972 – the year of his insightful *Tintagel*

score certainly does not lack majesty. Yet there are times, notably in the passage of the *Tristan* quotations before the recapitulation, when he is indulgently sluggish, so much so that the work is in danger of losing momentum and cohesion.

The only non-British orchestra to have recorded *Tintagel* is the Munich Symphony Orchestra (1998) under its regular guest conductor **Douglas Bostock**, another devotee of British music. The CD is available on the Classico label with Bax's Sixth Symphony and the *Overture to Adventure*. A little brisker at 14'37", Bostock's reading certainly lends the music a greater sense of impetus and his control of the orchestra is admirable. The recorded sound perhaps lacks the glow of Thomson's, and it's not so forward in its resonance and sheen. I find the opening tempo a little too languid for my taste (and the *Tristan* music is also rather languorous), but Bostock makes up for this with an animated development which has the excitement and vigour of Strauss with its growling brass, well-pronounced dynamics and well-graded *crescendos*.

### PANORAMIC VIEWS

Not long after Bostock's recording, in 2002, **Vernon Handley**, a lifelong champion of Bax, recorded the complete symphonies plus *Tintagel* and *Rogue's Comedy Overture* for Chandos with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. These recordings were in many ways a culmination of his devotion to Bax's music since his teens and of his service to recordings of Bax's music (which began with the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra as far back as 1965, when Bax's music was little played). The box-set contains an informative booklet with a discussion between Handley and the Bax scholar

Lewis Foreman; and the fifth CD of the set consists entirely of an interview with Handley by Andrew McGregor. At more than 15 minutes long, Handley's commanding interpretation is imposing, yet it never seems in danger of dragging (as is the case with Barbirolli and Thomson), mainly because Handley is so fastidious with the shaping of each phrase and because the tempos themselves are so sensitively graded. Indeed, such is Handley's understanding of the style and of the composer's subtle structural legerdemain that he seems able to mould the ever-changing prism of Bax's orchestra like malleable clay. The climaxes – especially the colossal return of the 'big tune' – in particular are handled with a controlled passion that is utterly persuasive, and the fervour of the string playing even outdoes Handley's one-time teacher Boult.

### MOST RECENT RECORDINGS

The reading of another great advocate of British music, **David Lloyd-Jones**, with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra on Naxos, is great value, particularly in its coupling with Bax's much-undervalued (and more 'Classical') Seventh Symphony. Lloyd-Jones is a little quicker than Handley, but his understanding of the score is similarly 'panoramic' in the grandiosity of the outer sections. The clarity and level of this recording readily allows much of Bax's orchestral polyphony to speak, above all in the central paragraph, where much of the detailed passagework is meticulously brought out. The energy, too, of this section of the tone-poem is highly gripping (perhaps the most dynamic of all the recordings) and one almost feels 'hurled' into the elemental landscape of the rocks and the dashing waves. This is definitely high on my list.

**Sir Mark Elder's** recording of *Tintagel* (on an attractive CD entitled 'English Landscapes') on the Hallé's own label (2005) is, at 17 minutes, by far the longest. Much as I find the orchestral sound here vivid, colourful and invigorating (the brass playing is exceptional), and the climaxes are cathedral-like in their splendour, the tempo of the opening (around crotchet = 50, compared with Bax's crotchet = 68) is now so slow that it's a real challenge to give direction to the principal melody; and for me at least, it serves to undermine important moments of *ritenuto* and climax. The middle section is better, but is still frustratingly lethargic and suffocatingly long-winded, a fact thrown into relief by the latest recording in the catalogue on the London Philharmonic Orchestra's own



Handley was devoted to the music of Bax

label (at almost 14 minutes) with **Osmo Vänskä** (the only non-British conductor to feature here). Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, in December 2007, the sound here is a little distant compared with the Lyrita, Chandos and Naxos recordings, but there is much attention to detail, and Vänskä brings a good sense of forward-motion to the larger structure, particularly in the last section of the tone-poem which moves to its conclusion with real purpose and force. There is also an attractive coupling with Rachmaninov's Third Symphony.

After considering this range of recordings (and they vary markedly), I am left with a difficult choice between Handley's wonderfully measured recording, the élan of Lloyd-Jones's splendidly incisive interpretation and Boult's insightful, sonorous reading on Lyrita. But in the end I am drawn to Handley's own personally nuanced performance of this magnificently picturesque canvas, with its finely engineered sound and the bonus of the complete symphonies, all of which make for edifying listening and a real appreciation of this great yet much underrated English genius. **G**

### TOP CHOICE

**Vernon Handley** Chandos **B** **5** CHAN10122 Handley was a lifelong devotee of Bax's music, and his love of it can be felt throughout *Tintagel's* emotionally charged score. This is a perfectly balanced interpretation,



with Handley's understanding of the composer's musical language and handling of the orchestra palpable and compelling.

# PLAYLISTS

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – and why not create your own too?

**G**ramophone critic Philip Clark pays tribute to a late jazz legend who enjoyed (or not) some important classical encounters. Tim Ashley, newly welcomed to the reviewers' roster, recommends the music recalled in DH Lawrence's novel *Aaron's Rod*, while pianist Cordelia Williams suggests pieces by a composer whose works she plays and adores.

## Remembering Ornette

**Philip Clark chooses 10 pieces in memory of the late saxophonist Ornette Coleman**

I knew that the peerless alto saxophonist, music theorist and modern-jazz militant Ornette Coleman was revered – but the outpouring of heartfelt affection that greeted the news of Coleman's death, aged 85, on June 11 was, to borrow the title of his breakthrough 1958 album, *Something Else*. Coleman's music – governed by a self-invented theory he termed 'harmolodics' – was antithetical to everything that classical convention symbolised. He aimed to liberate lines from their traditional functions; the bass player could take as happening a role in the melodic evolution of an improvisation as a leading melodic instrument. But, unlike the clear rules of Western convention, Coleman kept his ideas deliberately vague and open-ended – only through actually improvising could an understanding be reached.

His dealings with classical musicians were few but significant. Leonard Bernstein leapt onstage during a gig; Coleman's composition *The Fifth of Beethoven* was a sly response to the most famous motif in symphonic history. In 1960 he took part in a Gunther Schuller-led Third Stream session, his impassioned soloing blithely rescuing the stuffy composition; but a 1972 encounter with the LSO ended in bad blood and mutual incomprehension. Otherwise, pieces like *Lonely Woman* and *Focus on Sanity* register as staggering compositional objects, form and content perfectly aligned. Sleep soundly, Ornette.

- **Ornette Coleman** *The Fifth of Beethoven* (from *The Art of the Improvisers*)  
The Ornette Coleman Quartet  
Atlantic



Creator of staggering compositional objects: alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman, who died in June

- **Coleman** *Skies of America*  
Ornette Coleman *alto sax*  
LSO / David Measham  
Sony
- **Coleman** *Free Jazz*  
The Ornette Coleman Double Quartet  
Atlantic
- **Coleman** *Lonely Woman*  
Modern Jazz Quartet  
Atlantic
- **Coleman** *Sadness* (from *Live at Town Hall, 1962*)  
Ornette Coleman Trio  
Lumi Entertainment
- **Gunther Schuller** *Variants on a Theme of Thelonious Monk* (first section)  
Ornette Coleman *alto sax*; jazz ensemble;  
Contemporary String Quartet  
Heart and Soul Records
- **Coleman** *Little Symphony* (from *Twins*)  
Ornette Coleman Quartet  
Atlantic
- **Coleman** *Little Symphony*  
Joe Rosenberg's Affinity  
Music and Arts Programs of America

- **Coleman** *European Echoes* (from *At the Golden Circle, Stockholm*)  
Ornette Coleman Trio  
Universal
- **Coleman** *Focus on Sanity* (from *The Shape of Jazz to Come*)  
Ornette Coleman Quartet  
Atlantic

## Lawrence's Music

**Tim Ashley lists 10 pieces essential to a DH Lawrence novel**

A novel full of musical allusions, DH Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*, published in 1922, explores the cultural atmosphere of post-war Europe through the figure of Aaron Sisson, amateur flautist and colliery man, who walks out on his marriage and job to become a professional player, first at Covent Garden, then in Italy, where his flute, symbol of artistic integrity, is eventually destroyed by a fascist bomb.

Ever the irrationalist, Lawrence favours Wagner over Italian opera, balancing



Musical allusionist: the English writer DH Lawrence

a withering evocation of a performance of *Aida* with a description of Aaron's sexual impact on the Marchesa del Torre as 'like the fire-music putting Brunnhild to sleep', though the Marchesa's own tastes, ironically, incline to the more plebeian eroticism of chanteuse Yvette Guilbert. In a London awash with Tosti-loving philistines, Aaron recovers from flu during the 1919 epidemic by practising Debussy's *Pelléas*, and after he has fled to Italy discovers the Baroque purity of Pergolesi and Corelli.

Aaron's British ex-pat admirers, however, remember him playing 'that divine bit of Scriabin' – an anachronistic reference to the latter's 1914 London concerts, when he performed his own *Prometheus* – and there's a big discussion of Beecham's 1913 Russian season at Covent Garden: Aaron dismisses Rimsky-Korsakov's *Maid of Pskov* as 'artificial' and announces that he finds Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, 'which is all mass music practically, gives me more satisfaction than any other opera'. Lawrence tactfully refrains from telling us whether he agrees.

- **Verdi Aida**  
Sols; Rome Opera Orchestra / Solti  
Decca
- **Wagner Die Walküre – Magic Fire Music**  
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Karajan  
DG
- **Yvette Guilbert Elle était très bien**  
Yvette Guilbert *sng*  
EPM
- **Debussy Pelléas et Mélisande**  
Sols; Berlin Philharmonic / Karajan  
Warner Classics
- **Tosti Addio**  
Rosa Ponselle *sop*  
Naxos Historical

- **Pergolesi Flute Concerto in G major**  
Camillo Wanaussek *fl*  
Pro Musica Orchester Wien / Adler  
BnF
- **Corelli La follia**  
Michala Petri *rec* Mahan Esfahani *hpd*  
OUR Recordings
- **Scriabin Prometheus**  
Alexander Toradze *pf*  
Kirov Orchestra / Gergiev  
Philips
- **Rimsky-Korsakov The Maid of Pskov**  
Sols; Kirov Orchestra / Gergiev  
Philips
- **Mussorgsky Khovanshchina**  
Sols; Vienna State Opera Orchestra /  
Abbado  
DG

## Messiaen's world

### Pianist Cordelia Williams chooses 10 pieces by Olivier Messiaen

Since beginning my studies of Messiaen's great piano cycle *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, I have been blown away by the beauty and intricacy of this composer's writing. In addition to his deeply held Catholic faith, he combined many different musical layers: symbolism, theological concepts, works of literature and artistic images. These influences come together to create music which has an extraordinary range, both emotionally and acoustically.

From the *Vingt regards*, I have chosen three of my favourite movements. Each is a contemplation of the infant Jesus from a different perspective: Christmas Day



Blown away by Messiaen: pianist Cordelia Williams

itself, with clamouring bells announcing the birth; 'Silence', which meditates on the mystery of the Incarnation; and the 'Spirit of Joy', a wild and frenzied dance inspired by plainsong. I have been performing these pieces as part of my project 'Messiaen 2015: Between Heaven and the Clouds' ([messiaen2015.com](http://messiaen2015.com)).

*Visions de l'Amen*, for two pianos, is one of Messiaen's most exhilarating works to perform, not least for the charming imitation of birdsong. Like birdsong, the idea of 'liberation from time' is a recurring theme in Messiaen's compositions: the title of the *Quartet for the End of Time* refers to this idea. I also love the unbridled excitement of 'Dieu parmi nous', from the organ cycle *La Nativité du Seigneur*.

- **Eight Préludes – La colombe**  
Michel Béroff *pf*  
EMI
- **Turangalila-symphonie – Joie du sang des étoiles**  
CBSO / Rattle  
Warner Classics
- **Visions de l'Amen – Amen de la création**  
Maarten Bon, Reinbert de Leeuw *pfs*  
Naïve
- **O sacrum convivium!**  
Choir of St John's College,  
Cambridge / Guest  
Decca
- **Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus – Noël**  
Yvonne Loriod *pf*  
Apex
- **Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus – Regard de l'Esprit de joie**  
Yvonne Loriod *pf*  
Apex
- **L'Ascension – Alléluias sereins d'un âme qui désire le ciel**  
Thomas Trotter *org*  
Decca
- **La Nativité du Seigneur – Dieu parmi nous**  
Simon Preston *org*  
Decca
- **Quatuor pour la fin du Temps – Louange à l'éternité de Jésus**  
Alain Damiens *c/* Maryvonne Le Dizès *vn*  
Pierre Strauch *vc* Pierre-Laurent Aimard *pf*  
Decca
- **Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus – Regard du silence**  
Pierre-Laurent Aimard *pf*  
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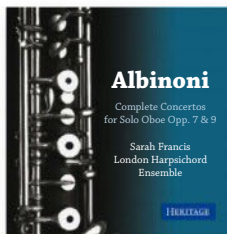
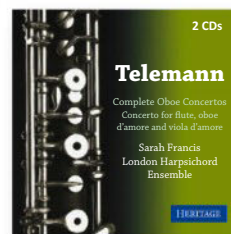
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## SARAH FRANCIS

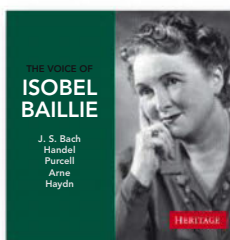
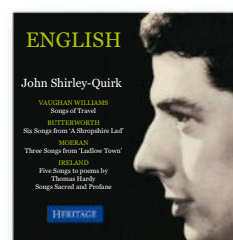
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HTGCD 229The Voice of  
Isobel Baillie  
HTGCD 273John Shirley  
Quirk:  
English Song  
HTGCD 283/4Great  
British  
Tenors  
HTGCD 286The Voice of  
Janet Baker  
HTGCD 290/1John Carol Case:  
Somervell  
Butterworth  
Elgar  
HTGCD 297  
AUTUMN 2015

# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Festivals are the main source of entertainment this month, and the delights of Salzburg, Glyndebourne, et al can be enjoyed in situ, on the radio or at your local cinema

## **Interlochen Center for the Arts, Michigan & live webcasts**

### **Interlochen Arts Festival, July 5 – August 9**

The Interlochen Arts Festival 2015 has 'Aaron Copland: The World of an Uncommon Man' at its heart: a celebration of the composer who visited Interlochen twice in the 1960s and '70s. Highlights include the Emerson String Quartet in Copland chamber works (July 23) and a rare performance of his opera *The Tender Land* (July 31). Several of the events are available as live webcasts, including the Martha Graham Dance Company in *Appalachian Spring* (July 22) and Barber's *Knoxville Summer of 1915* with soprano Christine Brewer (August 2). [interlochen.org](http://interlochen.org); [live.interlochen.org](http://live.interlochen.org)

## **Various venues, Salzburg & Radio Ö1**

### **Salzburg Festival, July 18 – August 30**

Many of the performances at this year's festival are being broadcast on ORF radio station Ö1. These include several that are live, highlights of which include: 'Mozart Matinee' (July 26) with the Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg under Andrés Orozco-Estrada in Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony No 41; a performance of Rihm's *Die Eroberung von Mexico* (also July 26) starring Angela Denoke and Bo Skovhus; and Beethoven's *Fidelio* (August 4) with the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Chorus under Franz Welser-Möst, starring Jonas Kaufmann and Adrianne Pieczonka. [salzburgerfestspiele.at](http://salzburgerfestspiele.at); [oe1.orf.at](http://oe1.orf.at)

## **Metropolitan Opera, New York (cinemas only)**

### **Summer HD Encores, July 22-29**

Until the new season starts, the Met's favourite Live in HD presentations are returning to cinemas worldwide. *The Merry Widow* (July 22) is a repeat of a broadcast back in January and stars Renée Fleming as Hanna Glwari, the femme fatale who takes on Paris in Lehár's enchanting operetta; Andrew Davis conducts. Meanwhile, *Aida* (July 29) was originally broadcast in December 2012 and stars Robert Alagna as Radamés; Fabio Luisi conducts this grand Verdi opera. [metopera.org](http://metopera.org)

## **Museum Prinsenhof, Delft & NPO Radio 4**

### **Delft Chamber Music Festival, July 31 – August 9**

This year's theme is 'Mind and Heart': – does prior knowledge of classical music improve our emotional experience while listening?

## EVENT OF THE MONTH

Donald Runnicles conducts Strauss on opening night



The 'Rejection of Time' concert (July 31) includes Ligeti's *Poème symphonique* for 100 metronomes and Finzi's *The Clock of the Years*, while 'Thinking and Feeling' (August 9) juxtaposes Mendelssohn's Piano Quartet Op 3 with Catoire's String Quintet Op 16. Performers include double bass player Rick Stotjin, cellist Christian Poltéra and Artistic Director (and violinist) Liza Ferschtman. Four concerts will be broadcast on NPO Radio 4, three of them live (including the two mentioned here). [delftmusicfestival.nl](http://delftmusicfestival.nl); [radio4.nl](http://radio4.nl)

## **Great Hall, Dartington & BBC Radio 3**

### **Dartington International Summer School, August 1-28**

In her inaugural year as Artistic Director, pianist Joanna MacGregor has compiled a tantalising programme. Highlights this year include: Jeffrey Skidmore conducting Ex Cathedra in music by Byrd, Tallis and Victoria (August 1); La Serenissima in sonatas by Vivaldi, Albinoni and Caldara (August 8); Emma Kirkby in instrumental and vocal works by Mozart, Haydn, Weber and Schubert (August 11); and Richard Tunncliffe in Bach's Cello Suites (August 10 & 11). On August 4, soprano Carolyn Sampson is joined by MacGregor and trumpeter Eric Vloeimans for a whistle-stop tour of the history of song, with repertoire ranging from Hildegard of Bingen to Gershwin; this concert will be recorded by BBC Radio 3 for future broadcast. [dartington.org](http://dartington.org); [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## **Usher Hall and Queen's Hall, Edinburgh & BBC Radio 3**

### **Edinburgh International Festival, August 7-31**

From Classical to contemporary music, from intimate recitals to epic concerts, Edinburgh International Festival has it all. Of the many events this year, 19 are being broadcast, mostly live, on Radio 3. At Usher Hall, these include the opening concert (August 8), featuring a performance of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* from the BBC Scottish SO under Donald Runnicles, and Mozart's Requiem (August 18) from the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer. At Queen's Hall, highlights include the Nash Ensemble (August 8) in music by Vaughan Williams and Schubert, and mezzo Sarah Connolly (August 17) in a recital of songs and Lieder by Schoenberg, Debussy and Strauss. [eif.co.uk](http://eif.co.uk); [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## **Glyndebourne & UK cinemas**

### **Kate Royal and Christine Rice star in Britten's The Rape of Lucretia, August 9**

Fiona Shaw's production, first aired at Glyndebourne on Tour in 2013, was described by the *Daily Telegraph* as 'opera at its most nakedly powerful'. This revival of Britten's 'chamber opera' stars Christine Rice as Lucretia, Catherine Wyn-Rogers as Bianca and Kate Royal as the Female Chorus, all accompanied by the LPO under Leo Hussain. Live screenings are being shown at nearly 40 cinemas across the UK; visit Glyndebourne's website for details. [glyndebourne.com](http://glyndebourne.com)

## **Berlin Philharmonic & Digital Concert Hall**

### **Rattle in Britten and Shostakovich, August 28**

Britten and Shostakovich may not seem an obvious pairing, but in fact they came to know each other when Shostakovich came to England for the London premiere of his First Cello Concerto, and they then became friends. The two works on the programme were composed at roughly the same time: Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, a homage to his revered teacher, came to fruition in the summer of 1937, while Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony was completed in 1936 but only received its premiere in 1961. The concert is streamed live on the Digital Concert Hall. [berliner-philharmoniker.de](http://berliner-philharmoniker.de); [digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)



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# HIGH FIDELITY

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An exciting range from a top British audio name, and the perfect radio for summer evenings. Plus, do audio demos play things too safe?

**Andrew Everard,**  
Audio Editor

## AUGUST TEST DISCS



For Linn Records, Pinnock delivers a demonstration-quality set including Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and a gorgeous *Siegfried Idyll*.



With beautiful solo viola-playing and a real sense of the power of the orchestra, the LSO Live's *Harold en Italie* shines as a 24-bit/96kHz download.

## New amps and speakers, and a DAC called DAVE

The latest audio product launches indicate no shortage of original thinking and tempting designs



The audio industry seems to be going through a period of strange names in the place of obscure model numbers at the moment.

Take DAVE **1**, the forthcoming digital-to-analogue converter from Chord Electronics, the company behind another recent DAC called Hugo. Claimed to be 'the world's most advanced digital to analogue converter', and handmade by Chord in Kent 'using proprietary techniques never seen before', DAVE will go on sale in the autumn, priced at £7995.

Its name apparently stands for 'Digital to Analogue Veritas in Extremis', which sort of suggests the acronym came first for this 'device so advanced and with so few compromises, that it is absolutely truthful in the extreme; a standard that all other DACs on the market simply cannot hope to match'.

The new DAC uses a Field Programmed Gate Array to run a new high-precision digital filter at up to 256 times the sampling frequency of the incoming digital signal, and a 20-element Pulse Array DAC with a second-order analogue noise-shaper designed to give ultra-high-frequency linearity. The whole thing is housed in milled-from-solid aluminium casework.

Also coining a new name is French speaker company Focal **2**, with its new

Sopra range drawing on the ideas of 'above' and 'supreme' for its naming. With styling derived from the company's Utopia range, the new Sopra No 1 standmount speaker and Sopra No 2 floorstander has its tweeter mounted in a graduated rear horn in the upper part of the enclosure, and mid/bass drivers using a Tuned Mass Damper in their suspension and a stabilised magnetic field design in their motor systems, ensuring linearity and stability. The No 1 will sell for around £8000/pair, and the No 2 at around £12,000.

Incorporating the technology of its flagship Statement amplifier, Naim has upgraded its existing power amplifier range with the addition of Discrete Regulated power supply technology and the same NA009 power output transistors used in the £155,000 Statement system's power amplifiers **3**. In electrical terms, the new DR power supply is said to be 30 times quieter than that used in existing Naim amplifiers. Separate power supplies are used for each channel in the new NAP250DR, NAP300DR and NAP500DR power amplifiers, which sell for £3495, £7295 and £19,500 respectively. DR power supply is also used in the NAP200DR, at £1925, to power an attached preamplifier. Naim will also offer the new technology as an upgrade for existing power amplifiers.

New from Neat Acoustics is the latest addition to its Momentum speaker range, the SX7i **4**. Selling for around £8000/pair, these slim floorstanding speakers use Neat's familiar inverted dome tweeter – albeit in a new anodised aluminium version – plus two 16.5cm mid/bass units backed up by two more drivers inside the cabinet in an isobaric configuration for good bass power and extension. Each drive unit is mounted in its own chamber within the 120cm-tall enclosure, and the speaker is available in a choice of finishes: Oak (Natural or Black), American Walnut and Satin White.

Finally this month, a product we couldn't ignore, simply because it's called Gramofon **5**! This little unit, available for around £45 at [gramofon.com](http://gramofon.com), can turn any hi-fi system into a 'zone' for wireless music streaming: connect it to the system, and then control all the Gramofons around the house using a smartphone, tablet, PC or Mac computer. It's made by Wi-Fi specialists Fon, and incorporates Qualcomm's AllPlay platform, allowing it to access not just UPnP streaming for locally stored music, but also streaming services including Spotify Premium, Napster, Rhapsody, TuneIn, Aupeo, doubleTwist and SomaFM. Future upgrades will occur automatically once a Gramofon is connected to a Wi-Fi network. **6**

## ● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

# Cambridge CXN/CXA80

Its brand name may have been shortened in its quest for a new identity, but Cambridge's network player and integrated amplifier are long on performance and value

Cambridge Audio is, in the eyes of some audio enthusiasts, very much a 'second string' hi-fi brand: due to its past concentration on low-priced amplifiers, CD players and the like, it acquired an erroneous reputation as a budget brand, when in fact 'bargain' would have been a more accurate description.

Things have changed a bit with the introduction of a flagship Azur 851 line-up, and there's a new identity, too: the latest CX range, of which the CXN network player and CXA80 amplifier are a part, carries a simplified 'Cambridge' name, along with new logos and corporate style.

'Great British Sound since 1968' is the slogan on the boxes, along with copious use of a stylised Union flag, and that flag and legend is also present on the start-up screen of the new-look display on the £700 CXN, as well as on stickers on the front panels of all the new models. Completing the CX hi-fi line-up, by the way, is the £300 CXC CD transport, designed to be used via the digital inputs of the CXN or one of the two amplifiers, both of which have onboard DACs, and the £500 CXA60 integrated amplifier, offering less power, a smaller transformer and lacking the balanced analogue and USB inputs of the £750 CXA80 amp we have here.

All four models are available in black or silver, and combine slimline styling with a sunken bevelled base to give what the company calls a 'floating aesthetic'.

The design and engineering process here is the familiar one followed by Cambridge

parent company Audio Partnership: the R&D work is all done at the company's London HQ, and then the products are made by longstanding suppliers in China, working closely with the UK engineers. What's more, Cambridge is using its in-house talent to go its own way where other companies opt for off-the-shelf third-party solutions: for example, the CXN uses a streaming module developed by Cambridge, and known as Zander. This is said to be 10 times faster than some rival designs, and

**'The latest CX range carries a simplified 'Cambridge' name, new logos and corporate style...' 'Great British Sound since 1968' is the slogan'**

works in concert with a redesigned control app, Cambridge Connect: running on Android or iOS smartphones or tablets, this harnesses the power of the chosen device to do much of the hard work of selecting content on network servers, rather than leaving that work to the player itself.

As well as accessing network content and internet radio via either wired or Wi-Fi networking (with a plug-in active antenna being provided for the latter), the CXN has built-in Apple AirPlay, and can accept an optional £70 Cambridge BT100 Bluetooth receiver to give aptX wireless connectivity with non-Apple devices. It's also compatible with Spotify Connect.



### CAMBRIDGE CXN

**Type** Network player/DAC/digital preamplifier

**Price** £700

**Inputs/sources** UPnP network player, internet radio, Apple AirPlay, Spotify Connect, optical/coaxial digital inputs, 3xUSB Type A and asynchronous USB Type B

**Outputs** Optical/coaxial digital, fixed/variable analogue on RCA phono and XLRs

**File formats** Up to 192kHz/24-bit, plus DSD64 on asynchronous USB

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset, C-Bus cable

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 43x8.5x30.5cm

### CAMBRIDGE CXA80

**Type** Integrated amplifier

**Price** £750

**Inputs** Four line-in on RCA phono (one with balanced XLR option, one with 3.5mm stereo option on front panel), two optical and one coaxial digital input, USB Type B

**Outputs** Two pairs of speakers, preout, subwoofer output, headphones (on 3.5mm stereo socket)

**Power** 80W per channel into 8ohms, 120W into 4ohms

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset, C-Bus cable

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 43x11.5x34.1cm  
**cambridge-audio.com**

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The CXN and CXA80 offer excellent performance: make the most of them!

### QNAP TS-251 NAS

If you want to store and serve your music, QNAP's smart TS-251 NAS is really simple to set up, thanks to a clear browser interface.



### BOWERS & WILKINS 684S2

The powerful yet precise sound of the CX components demands a similarly adept pair of speakers: the Bowers & Wilkins 684S2 is a good match.



In addition it has coaxial, optical and USB digital inputs, the last of these expanding its 192kHz/24-bit capability with the option of playing DSD64 files stored on a computer, and within it uses Cambridge's own second-generation Adaptive Time Filter processing to upsample all digital content to 384kHz/24-bit before passing it to the twin Wolfson DACs, thus reducing noise. This processing runs on a 32-bit SHARC processor, which is also able to offer variable output to the phono and XLRs analogue outs, using a sonically superior resampling system rather than the easier 'bit reduction' method, and enabling the CXN to function as a digital preamplifier if required.

The partnering 80W per channel CXA80 amplifier also has digital inputs feeding Wolfson DACs, with coaxial,

**'These aren't just products to snap at the heels of the Japanese majors - they could set standards in the sub-£1K hi-fi separates market'**

optical and USB sockets: the USB is switchable between the default USB 1.0 mode, in which it will accept content at up to 96kHz/24-bit, and USB2.0 for 192kHz/24-bit compatibility. It's also possible to use the BT100 Bluetooth 'dongle' with the amplifier.

Four line analogue inputs are provided, along with preamp-level outputs and a filtered subwoofer output, plus two sets of speaker outputs with individual switching.

Cambridge says the design here was all about component-reduction, to keep the signal paths as simple as possible for the best possible sound: after the input stage, all signals are converted to balanced working for optimum interference rejection, and the left and right channels are physically separated, but symmetrical, to avoid crosstalk and optimise stereo imaging. Finally, the amplifier has the company's proprietary protection built-in, along with a switching control able to turn the volume down autonomously should you be adventurous enough to push the CXA80's limits.

## PERFORMANCE

What's immediately apparent is that the designers' intention to give the new products a sound with better bass and more rhythmic drive has been realised very well here: the two components, whether separately or used together, have a sound that's bright, fresh and informative without ever becoming brash or hard-edged, and yet that is underpinned with a wonderfully well-extended and fluid bass. These aren't just products with the wherewithal to snap at the heels of the well-known Japanese majors' products or the entry-level offerings from what are often viewed as the top-flight British brands; rather they have every sign of the ability to set standards in the sub-£1000 hi-fi separates market.

That new app makes using the CXN simple, even with fairly extensive music libraries stored on a computer or NAS drive: my own library, albeit with an element of duplication across various formats for testing purposes, runs to some 11,000 items, in everything from MP3 to DSD and DXD, but the Cambridge found and presented all the content extremely quickly, and enabled instant playback of albums, tracks or playlists.

The rhythmic ability of the two is much in evidence with sets such as the recent Lucy Russell/John Butt recording of Bach's sonatas for violin and harpsichord on Linn Records, with rich, clear sound bringing out the qualities of both instruments in a glorious musical flow. Meanwhile with larger musical forces, such as on the San Francisco Symphony's own label set of Tchaikovsky's Fifth, the weight of the two is deployed to fine effect, while there's still illuminating insight into the sections of the orchestra, plus that persuasive 'live' feel to the whole enterprise.

What this combination does so well is deliver in 'hi-fi' terms while at the same time giving a vibrant, involving presentation of the music that's difficult not to like. Experimentation with various loudspeakers suggests the amplifier has more than enough power and control for most needs, and it sounds as adept when driving large floorstanding speakers

## Or you could try...

**Both the CXN and the CXA80 are pitched into highly competitive arenas, with the network player market in particular seeing substantial growth over the past few years...**



### Marantz NA6005; Pioneer N-70A

The main competition for the CXN comes from some of the best-known Japanese hi-fi names, including Marantz and Pioneer, with the former putting up a strong showing with the latest version of its entry-level network player, the NA6005. Selling for £400, it offers Spotify Connect and Apple AirPlay as well as network streaming and internet radio, and can handle DSD64 and DSD128 files. Pioneer's N-70A offers similar capability in a slimline, stylish package, and sells for about £100 more.

**For more information, visit [marantz.co.uk](http://marantz.co.uk); [pioneer.eu](http://pioneer.eu)**



### Arcam A19

The stereo amplifier market may be somewhat diminished, but competition for the CXA80 comes from Arcam in the form of the A19, selling for just under £600 and offering a 50W per channel output. Yes, it lacks the CXA80's digital inputs, but the price difference will go some way towards adding one of Arcam's range of offboard digital-to-analogue converters.

**For more information, visit [arcam.co.uk](http://arcam.co.uk)**

as it does with compact standmount models, while the wide-ranging abilities of the CXN network player/DAC/preamp make it something of a bargain in a fast-growing market. **G**

## ● REVIEW RUARK R1 MK3

# The perfect portable radio for house and garden

Subtle tweaks to a classic design make this newest version ideal for the Proms season

The new Ruark R1 Mk3 table radio looks, at first glance, just like the previous version, and indeed the original, which was launched getting on for a decade ago. But then, having come up with what was more or less instantly a classic back in 2006, you might forgive the Ruark team for sitting back, watching the sales roll in and concentrating on expanding the model line. After all, if you have a classic, why change it?

However, though they have launched more products along the way, including the stereo R2, the MR1 desktop speakers and of course the striking-looking R7 'radiogram', Ruark's designers have also subjected their original design to continual improvements. The result is that the current R1 is in fact the third-generation model, selling for £199 and now available in a choice of three finishes: the real-wood 'rich walnut' veneer of the review sample, soft white or soft black lacquer.

It retains all of the appeal of the first R1, standing just 17cm tall and having a fine combination of modern technology and solid loudspeaker engineering. The way

*'I took it out into the garden with my morning coffee – the display maintains its visibility well, even in bright sunlight'*

the cabinet sleeve wraps around the electronics gives it both solidity and style, while the novel RotoDial on the top panel and clear display make it simple to use.

In fact, both the RotoDial and the display have been improved here, the latter being an OLED design for clearer text, the former having a more logical control layout. The front and rear panels have also been tidied up.

Under the skin, the DAB and FM radio tuners have been retained, but with the addition of DAB+ capability, and the R1 Mk3 also has Bluetooth connectivity built-in, to allow music to be streamed wirelessly from your smartphone, tablet or computer.

Other features run to bass and treble adjustment for the built-in amplifier and speaker, plus a loudness function for a richer sound when listening at low levels; 10 presets each for analogue and digital radio; a USB socket to charge portable



### SPECIFICATION RUARK R1

**Type** Table radio with Bluetooth

**Price** £199

**Tuner** DAB/DAB+ and FM, with 10 presets for each band

**Inputs** Bluetooth, analogue line-in on 3.5mm stereo socket

**Output** Stereo headphones

**Other facilities** Tone and loudness controls, dual alarms with snooze and sleep functions

**Accessories supplied** Mains adapter; rechargeable battery and carry case available as options

**Dimensions** (HxWxD) 17x13x13.5cm  
**ruarkaudio.com**

devices; sockets for auxiliary input and headphones; and dual alarms.

As with the original R1, the new model is mains-powered via a plugtop adapter supplied, but can also become fully portable with the addition of Ruark's £50 BackPack rechargeable battery (which, as the name suggests, attaches to the rear of the radio), while a leather carrying case, the £40 CarryPack, is also available.

### PERFORMANCE

I've always liked the sound of Ruark's little radios, and for a while used a pair of the MR1 active speakers for my office system: the skill of the balance is that the sound has impressive weight and substance for a unit so small, but without straying into the plummy boxiness, reminiscent of vintage 'wirelesses', that afflicts some rival designs.

It's possible, with a little injudicious use of the tone controls, to make the R1 Mk3 take on just that coloration, or trade weight for an illusion of more detail at the expense of making the treble a little shrill and over-bright, but the basic 'everything set to flat' sound straight from the box is sufficiently attractive. It's also worth noting that the loudness function is subtle in its action, but

does seem to add a bit of heft to the sound at low volumes.

Yes, the overall balance is slightly on the safe side of neutral, but that works to good effect to give both music and speech an attractive warmth and authority, and I'd much rather have this well-judged sound than the thin, insubstantial sound of many a lesser portable radio, or that forced plumminess I referred to above. It's a sound that's stood Ruark in good stead over the better part of 10 years, and it's not hard to understand why.

Of course the R1 Mk3 is mono, having just the one speaker, although the headphone output is stereo, and that makes it a surprisingly effective radio for use around the house. Its overall sound is sufficiently informative to make listening to a wide range of music highly entertaining in situations where you can't sit down and concentrate on soundstaging, imaging and the like; then, when you switch to headphone listening, it proves a more than minor improvement on, say, listening to online streams via a computer, with the sound on FM being especially enjoyable.

During the time I spent with the Ruark, I used it as a kitchen radio and on the bedside table, making full use of the alarm functions, and as a means of listening to BBC Radio 3 live concerts through headphones when, to put it politely, the rest of the household didn't share my interest. It even sounded good with music streamed from my iPad via Bluetooth.

I tried it with a range of headphones including the Focal Spirit Pro, Musical Fidelity MF-200 and the new Oppo PM-3 – all of which are probably at a rather higher level of the market than would typically be used with this radio – and in each case it proved more than capable of not just driving the headphones but doing so to very good effect.

I even took it out into the garden, using the optional BackPack, to complement my morning cup of coffee or afternoon mug of tea, and as well as proving that it can sound enjoyable without resorting to neighbour-annoying levels, this also revealed that the new display maintains its visibility well, even in bright sunlight.

Nipped and tucked to keep it fresh, and with a high-quality sound to match its sleek finish, the latest Ruark R1 is a fine example of a classic design made even better. **G**

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## ● ESSAY

# Why isn't more classical music played at hi-fi shows?

Munich's audio event revealed plenty of products to inspire, but not much music to excite

Now firmly established as one of the world's better hi-fi shows, or possibly even the best, the annual High End show in Munich provides a showcase for those manufacturers wanting maximum exposure before serious audio enthusiasts, not to mention a platform for those with rather more radical design ideas, or companies just dipping their toe in the hi-fi waters and wanting to sound out visitors as to the viability of their products.

It's moved beyond being just a show for German manufacturers and distributors to sell to home-market enthusiasts: this year's event attracted over 500 exhibitors from more than 40 countries, with over half of those being non-German, while of the 20,000-plus visitors almost a third were from outside Germany. More than almost any other event, it's a must-see for those involved in the audio industry, and it's also noticeable that increasing numbers of enthusiasts are being tempted by low-cost flights and accommodation – oh, and the local beer – to get together with some friends and make a weekend of it.

While the show was perhaps a bit light on groundbreaking new launches, there was no shortage of novelty, with the attention being grabbed by a massive wooden horn speaker on display in one of the main glass-ceilinged atrium areas, and a tempting array of cars with high-end audio systems fitted on show in another of the halls.

And as an indicator of how seriously the car industry is now taking standard-fit or optional factory-fitted audio systems, to the chagrin of those companies involved in the aftermarket car audio industry, the brands represented ranged from Porsche, with Burmester audio onboard, to a much photographed Rolls-Royce Wraith, complete with an audio system developed by German company Eton, and the new Skoda Superb, which comes with a 12-speaker, 610W system developed by another German company, Canton.

On the home audio front, one thing many people were keen to investigate further was the Meridian-developed MQA



Truly 'High End': while not pretty, Silbatone's century-old, wardrobe-sized cinema speakers, driven by just 0.8W of valve amplification, once again provided the most entertaining sound of the Munich show in 2015

system, which promises high-resolution downloads and streaming using no more bandwidth than CD-quality music, plus a means of delivering all the quality of original recordings and an assurance that what you're hearing is the sound as the

*'If you asked me which was the best system for classical music, you'd probably get not much more than a shrug'*

artist or producer intended it to be heard. That's the 'Authenticated' part of Master Quality Authenticated, and the news at the show was that the company is now in discussion with more than 100 potential business partners, from streaming service providers to hardware companies such as Arcam and Onkyo. However, beyond Meridian's own products, there's still no firm news as to when MQA-enabled hi-fi equipment will start to hit the market, the company only promising that the 2015 IFA show, to be held in Berlin in September, will bring the next wave of announcements.

However, at this show, among the innovations ranging from more huge horn speakers to amplifiers and streaming hardware in all kinds of shapes and sizes, the usual massive turntables and of course headphones in any number of different styles, one thing struck me as showing a distinct lack of inventiveness – and that was the choice of music being played.

If you asked me which was the best system I heard at the show for classical music, you'd probably get not much more than a shrug: for all those exhibitors, and the presence of systems with price-tags likely even to make buyers of that fine-sounding Rolls-Royce take a deep breath, I could count the number of demonstrations I heard using classical works not just on the fingers of one hand, but on the fingers of one finger.

And even that was a strange version of the last movement of the *Symphonie fantastique*, played

remarkably slowly and seemingly with the bass and treble set to maximum boost.

Ah, but maybe that's to be expected if a show is aimed at attracting young people who want to hear what their favourite music can sound like on a fine system? Perhaps, but there was precious little 'young people's music' in evidence; instead, there were endless breathily plaintive female vocal cover versions of popular songs, giving a distinct impression, as one moved from one demonstration to another, of slipping between successive John Lewis Christmas TV commercials.

Plus, as I said apologetically to an acquaintance who plays a mean jazz piano, there was far too much tinkly piano jazz being played, usually by an iPad-wielding sales person hiding in the shadows of the room to avoid actually explaining what was being used in the demonstration, or maybe to disguise the fact that they were frantically tapping their toes completely out of rhythm with the music on offer.

Trouble is, when I offered this criticism to one of the show organisers – and after all, it's a criticism aimed at risk-averse exhibitors, not those running the show with their usual efficiency – she replied, with a slight shrug, 'Yes, I agree'.

It's impossible not to feel that, while the hi-fi industry has the wherewithal to offer much to music fans from the classical enthusiast to the much-vaunted 'iTunes generation', it may have lost the ability to break out of its comfort zone and start selling itself all over again. **G**

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# NOTES & LETTERS

Kaufmann at the Proms • Learning how to listen • The achievements of Charles Mackerras

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## Hail Germans at the Proms!

Nothing could be more appropriate than Jonas Kaufmann's appearance at this year's Last Night of the Proms. There are always German flags waved in the Royal Albert Hall and often flags of Bavaria and other German Länder. But the most extraordinary evidence of the Last Night's appeal to many Germans is found in Germany itself. For many years there have been 'British days' in northern Germany featuring outdoor replicas of the Last Night. In Hamburg (at the polo ground) and in Krefeld I have watched as thousands of Germans turned up with their miniature Union flags, fold-up chairs, picnic hampers and candelabras to sing *Land of Hope and Glory* and 'Rule, Britannia!' as lustily as any London crowd.

Equally curiously, these events also give Anglophile Germans the opportunity to play cricket and rugby, show off their old British sports cars, dress in tweeds and even queue for fish and chips.

David Woodhead

Leatherhead, Surrey

## The importance of listening

Apropos Martin Cullingford's 'The art of listening must not be allowed to fade' (Editorial, June), I thought I would share with you the following related concepts. Foremost for everyone is the wisdom of our beloved late conductor Claudio Abbado who proclaimed that 'we learn how to talk, but we don't learn how to listen'. Listening to his wisdom is probably the greatest legacy he bequeathed to us. And surely nothing could be more to the point than the comment by Richard Strauss that 'music is how our feelings sound'.



Right choice: Kaufmann is at the Proms' Last Night

## Letter of the Month



One of the most neglected conductors? Bruno Walter's work is exceptional and deserves to be heard

## In praise of conductor Bruno Walter

I must write about the much-appreciated Icon feature regarding Bruno Walter by Richard Osborne (July). Around 50 years ago, as someone who had little money then, I remember buying records conducted by him on Philips Classical Favourites, and being blown over by the sheer quality of the performances. A little later, I bought my first Bruno Walter discs in stereo, which included the performance of Bruckner's Fourth mentioned in the article. These stereo performances were perhaps a little slower than the earlier mono ones, but had a greater serenity to them. Bruno Walter has been one of my favourite conductors since then.

There have already been two articles in *Gramophone* this year praising

his work; in Classics Reconsidered regarding *Das Lied von der Erde* (January) and in a review of his Brahms (Reissues, February). Both describe his exceptional conducting. However, he must surely be one of the most neglected conductors, certainly in the UK, and I hope these articles begin to put right this neglect. Sony/BMG has brought out boxes of his Mahler and Mozart as well as the Brahms box, and also a 39-CD box-set of a comprehensive selection of his post-war work. For the sake of readers who do not know his conducting, I hope other boxes are released as well, so that they can hear and understand what a great conductor he was.

Michael Harrison, via email

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the September issue by July 27. Gramophone reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

**PRESTO**  
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As a lifelong chamber-musician cellist myself, as well as a clinical psychologist for decades, I am fully aware of how listening is paramount. Listening to recordings should remain crucial for all music lovers, especially those connected

to *Gramophone*. It's also the operative concept for all effective ensembles – string quartets, athletic teams, families, organisations and nations of the world.  
*Leon J Hoffman*  
Chicago, Illinois, US

## Respect for Charles Mackerras

I was surprised to read in John Warrack's book review (June) that Sir Charles Mackerras was 'disappointed at never having an orchestra of his own'.

Appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Concert Orchestra, he was later the first Australian to be appointed Principal Conductor of the Sydney SO, and later still Principal Guest Conductor of the Scottish CO (for which he became Conductor Laureate) and Music Director of the Orchestra of St Luke's. And if he was not appointed Musical Director at the Royal Opera House, he certainly was at the English National Opera and the Welsh National Opera. Indeed a perusal of his CV shows that his European career was both wide-ranging and highly regarded. He was one of the few London-based conductors who embraced an acclaimed conducting career in England, throughout Europe, the United States and Australia, and was respected both on the concert platform and at opera houses including Berlin, New York and Sydney. He has even been given a Wikipedia entry in Italian.

Not a bad result for a boy from Sydney who started playing in radio orchestras and in the pit for Gilbert and Sullivan when he was only in his teens. The ABC accounts department actually questioned one of his early payslips, not believing that a teenager could be working as a professional musician.

Michael Rolfé  
Brighton, UK

## Dame Janet: Elgar's 'Angel'

I was delighted to be informed by John Patrick, Head of Audio at ICA Classics, that the 1968 televised broadcast performance of Elgar's masterpiece, *The Dream of Gerontius*, is likely to appear on his label (Letters, July). I recall the programme vividly and was

overwhelmed by the greatness of Sir Adrian Boult's interpretation, as I was, of course, by Dame Janet Baker's definitive Angel. However, I would also like to recommend another of Dame Janet's performances for release on CD – the one she gave at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester Cathedral on August 18, 1984, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Elgar's death. I seem to recall that it was also broadcast on BBC television but seven years later, in February 1991.

This performance which, in my opinion, was equally as outstanding as the 1968 performance, was with Dame Janet, Stuart Burrows, Benjamin Luxon, the Festival Chorus, the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra all conducted by Andrew Davis. I was at that concert and have the Festival programme but I also have a video cassette taken from the 1991 TV broadcast, albeit with possibly a couple of bars missing from the start of the Prelude. As this must also be in the BBC archives somewhere, can we devoted Elgarians please have this transferred to CD and/or DVD as well?

Robin Self, *Secretary of the East Anglian Branch of the Elgar Society*  
Framlingham, Suffolk

## Plea for US female composers

I enjoyed the Q&A with Seraphic Fire's Artistic Director Patrick Dupré Quigley regarding his choir's latest recording, 'Reincarnations: A Century of American Choral Music' (Sounds of America, April, and digital edition). When I read this comment – 'It became clear that we could easily make an entire disc of young female American composers who aren't heard as much as they should be' – I brightened up. So now we'll get to hear some of them? Wow! Um...not exactly.

On page V is the review of the recording. It's a great one, it's got seven world premieres, it's got the likes of Morten Lauridsen, no less. The only thing it hasn't got is female composers, young or old, except perhaps 'Anonymous'. (She writes a lot of stuff).

It looks like young American women composers are still not going to be heard as much as they should be, but I'm sure they'll find Mr Quigley's comments very comforting. Or does he plan to bring out another recording, this time of women composers only? I hope not...unless the subtitle of 'Reincarnations' is changed to 'A Century of American Choral Music by Men'.

Anne Thackray  
Toronto, Canada

## NEXT MONTH SEPTEMBER 2015



## Behind the scenes of Pappano's Aida

Hugo Shirley travels to Rome to witness the grand-scale recording of *Aida* starring Jonas Kaufmann and Anja Harteros

## When science and music collide

Sarah Kirkup investigates the NMC label's 'Objects at an Exhibition' project at the Science Museum – how have composers been inspired by the exhibits on view?

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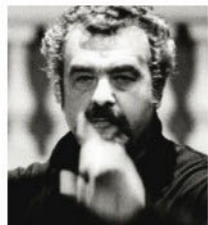
Dame Janet Baker: outstanding in Elgar in 1984

# OBITUARIES

A conductor and violinist; a film composer; a light orchestra musician; a writer, educator and horn player

## WALTER WELLER

*Conductor and violinist*  
Born November 30, 1939  
Died June 14, 2015



Walter Weller began his career as a violinist, joining the Vienna Philharmonic at 17 and later becoming its joint concertmaster with Willi Boskovsky, a post he held for 11 years.

His conducting break came in 1966 when he stood in for Karl Böhm in a concert of Schubert and Beethoven, and for Josef Krips in Brahms and Beethoven. From 1969 he conducted regularly in Vienna, both at the Volksoper and at the State Opera (where his Philharmonic colleagues were the house ensemble).

In 1977 he was appointed Principal Conductor of the RLPO and also conducted the RPO. He led the RSNO from 1992-97 before becoming Conductor Emeritus: he was honoured by the Bank of Scotland by appearing on a special £50 note.

As a violinist, and with his Weller Quartet, he recorded extensively for Decca including the celebrated Decca recording of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* credited to Sir Georg Solti and for which session, Weller claimed, Solti was absent.

As a conductor he recorded complete symphony cycles by Prokofiev and Rachmaninov (Decca), and Mendelssohn and Beethoven (Chandos), as well as the complete Beethoven piano concertos for Chandos with John Lill and the CBSO.

## JAMES HORNER

*Composer*  
Born August 14, 1953  
Died June 22, 2015



The Oscar-winning film composer James Horner – whose film scores include *Titanic*, *Avatar*, *Braveheart* and *Apollo 13* – has died in a plane crash in Southern California at the age of 61.

Born in LA, Horner spent much of his childhood in London where he studied at the Royal College of Music. His most recent score was for *The 33*, a film based on the rescue of the Chilean miners in 2010, which is due for release in November.

Horner won two Oscars in 1998 for *Titanic* (Best Score and Best Original Song for 'My Heart Will Go On'); he also won a *Gramophone* Award in the same year for the *Titanic* recording.

*Gramophone* interviewed Horner in 1998, and he spoke about the challenges of scoring *Titanic*: 'When James Cameron and I first discussed it I told him that what attracted me to the project was the love story set in the milieu of the overall tragedy. Anybody could score the ship sinking, but music was needed for the more sensitive aspects of the movie...

'The film was not fully edited when I worked on it... This made the job more difficult because not only did I have to keep altering things, but the concept of individual scenes could change, and on a larger scale this affected how scenes worked in the broader context.'

Horner also spoke to *Gramophone* about his chosen profession: 'I think film is as close to the perfect outlet for music as a serious contemporary composer could find... To write a film score and put your all into it is the contemporary version of writing an opera or an oratorio – the downside is you have an employer and you have to make changes on his whim. But I think that has always been the case: Mozart, Haydn and Bach had to change things when writing a commission. I'm writing a commission for a contemporary art form that will (hopefully) appreciate it.'

## ERNEST TOMLINSON

*Composer and conductor*  
Born September 19, 1924  
Died June 12, 2015



Ernest Tomlinson, the doyen of the light orchestral world, has died at the age of 90. His most popular works were in the lighter vein, notably *Little Serenade* and *Suite of English Folk Dances*.

Tomlinson was born in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, and his education was divided between Manchester Cathedral Choir School and his local grammar school. He studied composition at Manchester University, and organ, piano and clarinet at the Royal Manchester College of Music.

He was called up to the RAF, where he trained as a wireless mechanic, after which he worked as an organist in Mayfair

and as a copyist for a music publisher.

During this time, he arranged scores for radio, TV, recording and the stage. From 1955, he pursued a freelance career, accepting commissions from the BBC and forming his own light orchestra.

When the Light Programme ended in 1967, broadcasts of Tomlinson's music became less frequent. In 1984, he established the Library of Light Orchestral Music, a collection of more than 50,000 orchestra sets dating from the mid-1850s.

Tomlinson continued working until his late eighties, rescoring existing works and representing the Light Music Society and the Performing Rights Society. He was appointed MBE in 2012.

## GUNTHER SCHULLER

*Polymath*  
Born November 22, 1925  
Died June 21, 2015



Gunther Schuller, the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, has died at the age of 89. He was also a horn player and educator, and led the Third Stream

movement which fused jazz and classical.

Schuller was born in New York into a family of classical musicians. He soon developed into a virtuoso horn player, eventually joining the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra where he remained until 1959.

As a teenager, Schuller heard Duke Ellington on the radio and was convinced that this music was as great as Beethoven's and Mozart's. He began frequenting jazz clubs and went on to perform horn with Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and Ornette Coleman. In 1957, he courted controversy in musical circles by coining the term Third Stream.

By the 1960s, Schuller spent most of his time teaching, writing and composing. He also founded the New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble and the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, and guest conducted with many orchestras.

As a writer, he authored educational works and jazz histories, including *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (1968); and as a composer he produced orchestral works such as *Symphony* (1965), as well as two operas. His Third Stream-style works include *Transformation for Jazz Ensemble* (1957).



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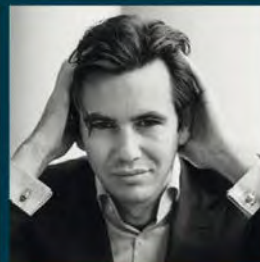
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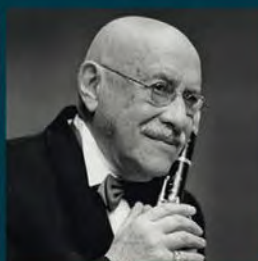
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*Beigelbeck*.





















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Harrison, S Solos & Duos. *Sheppard Skærvæd/Trandafilovski/*

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			German Dances, D783	<b>94</b>				
			Impromptus, D899	<b>65</b>				
			Masses – Nos 5 & 6	<b>34</b>				
			Sonata in B flat, D960	<b>65</b>				

# Jenna Russell

The actress and singer on hanging out at Ronnie Scott's in her teens, working with John Wilson and admiring Maria Callas

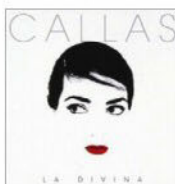
**M**y dad loved Judy Garland. We used to listen to a lot of the album 'Judy at Carnegie Hall' and also Judy and Liza's 'Live at the London Palladium'. And my mum was very into jazz, so we would listen to Nina Simone, Sarah Vaughan – her album 'After Hours at the London House' is still one of my favourites.

**When I was** in my early teens, my mum went out with the bass player in Ronnie Scott's Quintet. They were together for eight years so I would spend every weekend at Ronnie's – I'd sit at the back or in the bar area with the most extraordinary musicians, although I didn't know that at the time. I remember watching people like Nina Simone and Stan Tracey – I had an epiphany watching him. I wish I'd seen Sarah Vaughan though; every week, Ronnie would say, 'Thanks for coming – next week we've got Sarah Vaughan,' but it was a joke – she never came...

**I didn't ignore** classical music completely. I had a go at the cello but I remember it being too heavy so I gave up on that after a while. I did want to play the trumpet but I just couldn't get a sound out of it, so at primary school I played timpani instead – I remember enjoying my part in *Men of Harlech*! My mum also introduced me to Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. And I listened slavishly to Maria Callas. I'm someone who's always appreciated the beauty of vocal imperfection and, while of course Callas was doing everything right, she always sounded to me like she was stretching for the notes. I was drawn to that dramatic quality of her singing.

**And singing was** what I enjoyed most. I remember listening to the Maria/Anita duet from *West Side Story* on a record player where you could turn down one of the voices, so I'd waste hours singing one part and then the other, getting to sing with the actual people in the movie. But I'm not sure I ever thought I'd sing professionally. I'd moved around a lot as a child and had had enough of the 'big school' scenario. Through a fellow cab driver, my dad managed to get me an audition with Sylvia Young. I sang 'Something's Coming' from *West Side Story* and I guess Sylvia must have seen something in me. Going to her school changed my life.

**I never thought** about going down the classical route – I just don't have the equipment. I still can't read music – it's kind of a blessing and a curse. What I need is an education in classical music, for someone to take my hand and explain the context for a piece of music. When I'm in a record shop, it's overwhelming – I know there are probably 60 artists I've never heard of who I would love, but I don't know where to start. I recently bought a CD of John Adams's *Nixon in China*



## THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

### 'La Divina'

Maria Callas *sop* Philharmonia Orch / various  
EMI © 754 702-2

I've had this – in three-cassette, box-set form – since I was 15. I would have loved to see her sing live.

– another attempt to teach myself about opera! – and I loved it. I listened to it religiously on the drive home during the run of *Merrily We Roll Along* at the Menier Chocolate Factory a couple of years ago. But I honestly can't remember the last opera or classical music concert I went to.

**Maybe I should** go to one of John Wilson's Proms this year. I've performed at a Prom before, but never been to one. I recently did a Sondheim concert with John and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, and back in October 2013 I did a concert version of *South Pacific* with him. He's become a good friend now – I adore him. I love sitting in with him during the orchestral rehearsals. It's a laugh in there but he can hear *everything*. I can see why orchestras love working with him.

**I'm not sure** that my listening habits have changed much over the years. I still listen to who I like, and still buy CDs, although I do have a Spotify account and manage to hook up my phone to a little speaker so I can listen to things. But I also still have my Goodmans hi-fi system and my tape deck...A lot of my early music is on tape – you can't get rid of those compilations people make you as a teenager! **G**

*Jenna Russell stars in Songs for a New World, July 22 – August 8, at St James Theatre; for more information, visit [stjamestheatre.co.uk](http://stjamestheatre.co.uk)*

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#### NORWAY'S MIDNIGHT SUN: A MIDSUMMER CRUISE ACROSS THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

A THIRTEEN NIGHT HOLIDAY | 12 JUNE 2016

Sailing from Dover - visiting the North Cape, Finnmark, Tromsø and Trondheim and cruising along some of Norway's most spectacular fjords.

*Featuring: The Carducci String Quartet; Elisabeth Perry, violin; Moray Welsh, cello; Simon Rowland-Jones, viola; Simon Lepper, piano. They will be joined by a singer, details to be announced.*

Calling first at the lovely town of Ålesund we then sail in a northerly direction enjoying some wonderful cruising between the mainland and islands of Norway. At Alta in Finnmark we can discover more about the Sami culture before we reach Honingsvåg, the world's most northerly city and gateway to the North Cape. Sailing south we experience the Midnight Sun on Midsummer day in Lødingen and call in at one of the country's most historic cities, Trondheim.

*Price from £2,210 per person for thirteen nights including all concerts, talks and interviews, full board throughout and two private drinks parties.*



Norwegian Fjords

#### A CRUISE TO SPAIN, MOROCCO & PORTUGAL

AN ELEVEN NIGHT HOLIDAY | 31 OCTOBER 2016

Sailing from Harwich - visiting Vigo (for Santiago de Compostela), Casablanca (for Rabat), Cadiz, Lisbon and Oporto

*Featuring: The Gould Piano Trio; David Evans, violin & viola; Robert Plane, clarinet; Alec Frank-Gemmill, Principal Horn of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. They will be joined by a singer, details to be announced*

Sailing to the northwest corner of Spain we will visit Santiago de Compostela, destination of so many weary pilgrims throughout the centuries. We continue to Morocco's Imperial Cities and later call in at Cadiz from where the Spanish conquistadors set sail for South America, and the sherry bodegas of Jerez. From Lisbon we will visit Sintra in the hills above the city, and finally we stop at Portugal's buzzing second city, Oporto.

*Price from £1,850 per person for eleven nights including all concerts, talks and interviews, full board throughout and two private drinks parties.*



Oporto

#### ART CITIES OF FLANDERS, THE NETHERLANDS & GERMANY

A SEVEN NIGHT HOLIDAY | 11 NOVEMBER 2016

Sailing from Tilbury - visiting Zeebrugge (for Bruges), Hamburg and Amsterdam

*With three exclusive concerts given by the Navarra String Quartet*

We have selected this cruise as one of our three because it allows us a full day in beautiful Bruges and overnight stays in both Hamburg and Amsterdam, giving us plenty of time to enjoy all these cities' great museums and galleries. We also hope to be able to attend an optional performance at the historic Concertgebouw, Amsterdam's beautiful concert hall and at the Hamburg State Opera, one of the most important German opera houses.

*Price from £1,480 per person for seven nights including three concerts, talks and interviews, three private excursions, full board throughout and two drinks parties.*



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